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General Assembly
Security Council

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General Assembly
Seventieth session
Agenda item 35
Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Identical letters dated 2 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the statement of the delegation of Georgia (see annex) in response to the letters circulated by the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations on 11 May 2016 (A/70/869 and A/70/870).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 35, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kaha **Imnadze**
Permanent Representative

16-08996 (E) 070616

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Annex to the identical letters dated 2 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Statement of the Delegation of Georgia in response to the letters circulated by the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation on 11 May 2016

On 11 May 2016, at the request of the Russian Federation two documents (A/70/869 and A/70/870) were circulated at the UN General Assembly which contained the so-called "appeals" of the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia" and the 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Ossetia" with a declared goal of tarnishing Georgia's reputation and undermining her sovereignty and territorial integrity. Replete with erroneous statements and false figures to fabricate history, these letters contradict the purposes and principles of the United Nations, are counterfactual and do not befit the eminent status of permanent member of the UN Security Council with a primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

* * *

The purpose of this letter is to expose the fallacy of the preposterous statements and vitriolic accusations contained in the Russian letters by presenting fact-based arguments on the nature of the Russo-Georgian conflict and its various dimensions, and by providing references to reputable international sources.

We would like to state upfront that the so-called "Republic of Abkhazia" and "Republic of South Ossetia" are nothing more than Russia's occupation regimes in north-western and central parts of Georgia which constitutes 20 percent of Georgia's sovereign territory. Russia illegally maintains tens of thousands of troops, armaments and military bases in those areas which have been depopulated as a result of ethnic cleansing, deportation and other forms of mass atrocities against the majority population.

The occupying power exercising authoritarian control over Georgia's two regions has no regard for the lives or future of the people living on either side of the occupation line. By erecting fortifications and razor-wire fences, the Russian Federation is dividing families, hindering human-to-human interaction and stymying freedom of travel, the right to education and healthcare in the tightly-knit communities where intermarriage and ethnic diversity have been a fact of life for centuries.

Russia's illegal military presence in the occupied territories is the number one reason why hundreds of thousands of Georgian IDPs and refugees cannot return to their homes and why Georgian citizens living in the occupied territories cannot fully enjoy the freedoms and rights, including the freedom of movement and the right to education and healthcare, as well as other public services provided by the Georgian State. Like "black holes"[1] — in the words of Ms. Navi Pillay, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights — the Russian-occupied Georgian regions are

[1] Opening remarks by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay at a press conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, 21 May 2014; retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14624&LangID=E.

engulfed with crime, corruption and backwardness. A detailed account of mass human rights violations are given in the Quarterly Reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia on the Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Regions of Georgia.[2]

The severity of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories has been once again exposed by a brutal murder of an unarmed Georgian citizen, Giga Otkhozoria, in the village of Khurcha, close to the Nabakevi Crossing Point at the occupation line, on 19 May 2016. Committed by so-called "border guards", this criminal act once again demonstrates the highly alarming situation in the occupied Abkhazia region of Georgia, and the full responsibility for it lies with the Russian Federation exercising effective control over the territory. This inhumane killing reconfirms the urgent need of establishing international security and human rights monitoring mechanisms in the occupied Georgian regions.

* * *

The ill-concealed goal of the Russian letters is to politicize the question related to the rights of the forcibly displaced persons by linking it to the political agenda of the occupying force. In sharp contrast, the text of the annual UN General Assembly humanitarian resolution on the "Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia" has been consciously stripped off political content and finger-pointing and, instead, has been based on the universally recognized principles, cemented in numerous international documents, such as "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement" and the UN General Assembly Resolution on "Protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons."

In this part of our letter, we will refer to some of the important international documents regarding Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the ethnic cleansing against Georgians and other forms of crime committed in the occupied territories, as well as the political and humanitarian aspects of the Russo-Georgian conflict that have been addressed by the United Nations Security Council, the OSCE, the EU, and the International Criminal Court.

The United Nations

The United Nations Security Council was actively engaged with Georgia from 1993 to 2009 — until the Russian Federation brazenly used its veto power to block the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). For 16 years, the UN Security Council unanimously reaffirmed "the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders" and stressed the necessity "to address seriously

[2] First, Second, Third and Fourth Quarterly Reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia on the Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Regions of Georgia, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/421 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/608 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/982 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/161.

the need for a dignified return of IDPs and refugees, including their security and human rights concerns".[3]

In its Resolution 876 (1993), the Security Council affirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes and expresses its deep concern "at the human suffering caused by conflict in the region, and at reports of 'ethnic cleansing' and other serious violations of international humanitarian law".[4]

UNSC Resolution 993 (1995) reaffirms "the right of all refugees and displaced persons affected by the conflict to return to their homes in secure conditions in accordance with international law and as set out in the Quadripartite Agreement on voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons (S/1994/397, annex II), signed in Moscow on 4 April 1994, "deploring the continued obstruction of such return" by [the so-called] 'Abkhaz authorities' and underlining that return of refugees and displaced persons to the Gali region would be a welcome first step".[5]

UNSC Resolution 1187 (1998) "expresses its deep concern at the significant outflow of refugees resulting from the recent hostilities, reaffirms the right of all refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes in secure conditions in accordance with international law and as set out in the Quadripartite Agreement of 4 April 1994 on the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons (S/1994/397, annex II), calls upon both sides to fulfil their obligations in this regard, and demands in particular that the Abkhaz side allow the unconditional and immediate return of all persons displaced since the resumption of hostilities in May 1998".[6]

These are just several provisions of more than 80 UN Security Council resolutions, presidential statements and communiques adopted in 16 years between 1992 and 2009 that speak loudly to the political and humanitarian aspects of the conflict, including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and the inalienable right of all displaced persons to return to their homes. For instance, the Security Council in its Resolution 896 (1994) called "upon all concerned to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia, and" stressed "the importance it attached to such respect".[7] In the same resolution, the Security Council recognized "the grave situation in the Republic of Georgia created by the presence of almost 300,000 persons displaced from Abkhazia" and condemned "any attempts to change the demographic composition of Abkhazia, Republic of Georgia, including by repopulating it with persons not previously resident there."

Not only did the Russian Federation do nothing to facilitate the return of IDPs and refugees, it created two dangerous precedents in the history of UN peacekeeping by vetoing the extension of the UN Mission, after the August 2008 war, when it was needed most; and by turning itself from a peacekeeping force into

[3] UN Security Council Resolutions on Georgia, including, for instance, Resolution 1716 (2006), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1716%20(2006).
[4] UNSC Resolution 876 (1993), available at http://www.un.org/fr/sc/repertoire/93-95/CHAPTER%208/EUROPE/item_8_Georgia.pdf.
[5] UNSC Resolution 993 (1995), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/993(1995).
[6] UNSC Resolution 1187 (1998), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1187%20(1998).
[7] UNSC Resolution 896 (1994), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/896(1994).

an occupational force after refusing to withdraw from Georgia against the will of the host nation and staying up to date on Georgian soil without any international mandate.

We should recall that on 25 January 1994 the UN Secretary-General submitted a report to the Security Council on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia. The report laid out two options for a peacekeeping force. Under Option 1, the Council could establish a traditional United Nations peacekeeping force, under United Nations command and control. With the insistence of the Russian Federation, the regional model under Option 2 was chosen, which called for the creation of "a multinational military force, not under UN command and consisting of contingents made available by interested Member States, including the Russian Federation."[8] Under this option, the Security Council entrusted UNOMIG with "monitoring the multinational force".

Unfortunately, the genuine multinational force was never established. As throughout the 1990's and early 2000s, it became all too obvious that the Russian Federation was party to the conflict, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force, consisting exclusively of Russian military personnel, violated all acceptable principles of peacekeeping outlined by the Secretary-General's report. The report required that a regional force have "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia; consent of the parties; impartiality; multinational character; a clear mandate; transparency; an integral link to a political process for resolution of the conflict; and a plan for orderly withdrawal."[9] The Russian peacekeeping force was in serious material breach of all of these requirements. Although Russia voted for UN Security Council resolutions reaffirming Georgia's territorial integrity, it challenged Georgian sovereignty by offering political and military support to the so-called "Abkhaz authorities" and by illegally granting Russian passports to residents of Abkhazia.[10]

The Russian government's coercive measures against Georgia undermined its claim to impartiality. In 2006, Russia cut transportation and postal links with Georgia, deported hundreds of Georgian nationals,[11] banned the import of Georgian mineral water, wines and other goods, and influenced the increased price of gas deliveries to Georgia. These hostile acts cast serious doubt on the Russian government's claim of impartiality in the so-called "Abkhazia conflict". Furthermore, the Russian-led operation did not ensure the orderly and dignified return of IDPs and, in fact, yielded no positive results at all.

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[8] United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia*, S/1994/80 (January 25, 1994), available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Georgia%20S199480.pdf.

[9] United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia*, S/1994/80 (January 25, 1994), available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Georgia%20S199480.pdf.

[10] Parliament of Georgia, *Some Facts of Russian Policy Towards Georgia*, available at http://www.parliament.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=63&info_id=13323.

[11] In 2014 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russia had violated a number of articles of the European Convention in 2006. The ECHR found that in the autumn of 2006, a coordinated policy of arresting, detaining and expelling Georgian nationals had been followed by the Russian authorities, violating international law that bars the "collective expulsion of aliens" and "inhuman and degrading treatment." ECHR 196 (2014); 03.07.2014, retrieved from http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-4811514-5865358#{"itemid":["003-4811514-5865358"]}.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE was engaged in Georgia through the OSCE Mission from 1992 to 2009. The Mission had to stop its activities after Russia broke the consensus on extension of the OSCE mandate at the end of 2008.

In 1994, the CSCE participating States, including the Russian Federation, adopted an outcome document of the Budapest Summit in which they "... reiterated their strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders". Furthermore, the Heads of States "...expressed their deep concern over "ethnic cleansing", the massive expulsion of people, predominantly Georgian, from their living areas and the deaths of large numbers of innocent civilians".

The OSCE Heads of State, including the Russian Federation, stated in the Outcome Document of the 1996 Lisbon Summit: "We reaffirm our utmost support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We condemn the 'ethnic cleansing' resulting in mass destruction and forcible expulsion of predominantly Georgian population in Abkhazia. Destructive acts of separatists, including obstruction of the return of refugees and displaced persons and the decision to hold elections in Abkhazia and in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, undermine the positive efforts undertaken to promote political settlement of these conflicts. We are convinced that the international community, in particular the United Nations and the OSCE with participation of the Russian Federation as a facilitator, should continue to contribute actively to the search for a peaceful settlement."

The OSCE Heads of State, including the Russian Federation, declared in the Outcome Document of the 1999 Istanbul Summit: "We reiterate our strong condemnation as formulated in the Budapest and Lisbon Summit Documents, of the "ethnic cleansing" resulting in mass destruction and forcible expulsion of predominantly Georgian population in Abkhazia, Georgia". At this Summit, the Russian Federation also took a legally binding commitment to withdraw all its military bases and personnel from Georgia, in breach of which it remains to this date.

The EU-commissioned Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG)

By its decision of 2 December 2008 the Council of the European Union established an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) that was chaired by Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, a Swiss diplomat. This was the first time in its history that the European Union decided to intervene actively in a serious armed conflict. The IIFFMCG focused its investigation on the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008.

In its report published in September 2009, the IIFFMCG said it "found patterns of forced displacements of ethnic Georgians who had remained in their homes after the onset of hostilities. In addition, there was evidence of systematic looting and destruction of ethnic Georgian villages in South Ossetia."[12] "Consequently, several elements suggest the conclusion that ethnic cleansing was

[12] Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia Report (IIFFMCG), Volume I, p. 27.

indeed practiced against ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia both during and after the August 2008 conflict,"[13] in addition to "widespread campaigns of looting and destruction of ethnic Georgian settlements by South Ossetians, as well as ill-treatment, gender-related crime including rape, assault, hostage-taking and arbitrary arrests, together with the failure by Russian forces to prevent and stop violations by South Ossetian forces, armed irregular groups and armed individuals before and after the ceasefire in South Ossetia and the adjacent territories."[14] "The Russian forces failed to prevent these acts and, most importantly, did not stop the looting and pillage after the ceasefire, even in cases where they witnessed it directly."[15] "The Russian authorities and the South Ossetian authorities failed overwhelmingly to take measures to maintain law and order and ensure the protection of the civilian population as required under IHL and HRL."[16]

The IIFFMCG then concluded that "Russia was involved in the conflict in several ways. First, Russian peacekeepers who were stationed in South Ossetia on the basis of the Sochi Agreement were involved in the fighting in Tskhinvali. Second, Russian regular troops were fighting in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and deeper in Georgian territory. Third, North Caucasian irregulars took part in the fighting. Finally, Russia supported Abkhaz and South Ossetian forces in many ways, especially by training, arming, equipping, financing and supporting them."[17]

In regard to Georgia's tireless efforts for years before the August 2008 war to change the negotiating format and replace the Russian "peacekeepers" with impartial international forces, the IIFFMCG observed that "increasing pressure from the parties as well as the changing international environment made the existing peace mechanisms lose their grip on the situation and give way when the events took a critical turn."[18] The Mission goes even farther by saying that "no party to the conflict or party which is considered to be strongly supportive of any of the sides should assume a position of command, or chair, or arbiter nor exercise any other control of an operation which rests on the notion of impartiality and even-handedness in order to be effective."[19]

"More than 35 000 IDPs/refugees are not expected to return to their homes in the foreseeable future", the IIFFMCG said, "owing to the continued insecurity of the situation or to the destruction of their homes and property. It needs to be stressed that both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, together with Russia, must take appropriate measures to ensure that IDPs/refugees including those from the conflicts of the early 1990s [altogether up to 400 000 persons], are able to return to their homes with no conditions imposed other than those laid down in relevant international standards."[20] In this regard, I would add that there is a plethora of evidence suggesting that the entire Georgian villages in the Tskhinvali region have been bulldozed and the Russians are constructing military and other facilities in their place.

[13] Ibid, Volume I, p. 27; Volume II, p. 392.
[14] Ibid, Volume I, p. 27.
[15] Ibid, Volume II, p. 365.
[16] Ibid, Volume II, p. 375.
[17] Ibid, Volume II, p. 263.
[18] Ibid, Volume I, p. 34.
[19] Ibid, Volume I, p. 34.
[20] Ibid, Volume I, p. 27-28.

The IIFFMCG also found that the granting of Russian passports to Georgian citizens in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali was illegal. "The vast majority of purportedly naturalized persons from 'South Ossetia' and Abkhazia are not Russian nationals in terms of international law. Neither Georgia nor any third country need acknowledge such Russian nationality. Consequently, the persons living in 'South Ossetia' and Abkhazia who had first become Georgian citizens after the dissolution of the Soviet Union continue to remain so irrespective of "passportization" policies."[21]

The IIFFMCG further concluded that given Russia's unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" as independent states, "established principles of international law such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states were ignored." The IIFFMCG was especially concerned about the future of Europe's security architecture that Russia has been attempting to overhaul in its entirety. "The political culture of cooperativeness that had developed in Europe since the 1970s, and which was enshrined by CSCE/OSCE landmark documents from the Helsinki Final Act (1975) to the Istanbul Charter for European Security (1999), as well as the relevant documents adopted in the framework of the Council of Europe, has suffered. The threat and use of force have now returned to European politics." In this regard, the Report calls for efforts "to renew awareness of [the OSCE's] importance for European security and cooperation, together with a return to its strict observance and application."[22]

Concerning Russia's claims that the two Georgian provinces had the right to secede from Georgia, the IIFFMCG Report strictly states that "only former constituent republics [of the USSR] such as Georgia but not territorial sub-units such as 'South Ossetia' or Abkhazia are granted independence in case of dismemberment of a larger entity such as the former Soviet Union. Hence, South Ossetia did not have a right to secede from Georgia, and the same holds true for Abkhazia for much of the same reasons. Recognition of [the occupied entities] such as Abkhazia and 'South Ossetia' by a third country is consequently contrary to international law in terms of an unlawful interference in the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the affected country, which is Georgia. It runs against Principle I of the Helsinki Final Act."[23]

As regards Moscow's overt quest for a sphere of interest, the IIFFMCG concluded "political concepts and notions such as privileged spheres of interest or otherwise laying claim to any special rights of interference into the internal or external affairs of other countries are irreconcilable with international law. They are dangerous to international peace and stability and incompatible with friendly relations among States. They should be rejected."[24]

The International Criminal Court (ICC)

In January 2016, following the ICC Prosecutor's request, Pre-Trial Chamber I authorized an investigation of any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court, committed in and around Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, between the 1st of July and the 10th of October, 2008.

[21] Ibid, Volume I, p. 18.
[22] Ibid, Volume I, p. 32.
[23] Ibid, Volume I, p. 17.
[24] Ibid, Volume I, p. 36.

According to the Chamber, "an international armed conflict existed between Georgia and the Russian Federation between 1 July 2008 and 10 October 2008. The existence of such international armed conflict is rather uncontroversial as concerns the period of armed hostilities between Georgian and Russian armed forces between 8 and 12 August 2008 and the period of Russian occupation of parts of Georgian territory, in particular the "buffer zone", until at least 10 October 2008. In addition, the Chamber considers, at this stage, that there is sufficient indication that the Russian Federation exercised overall control over the South Ossetian forces, meaning that also the period before the direct intervention of Russian forces may be seen as an international armed conflict".[25]

The Chamber further notes that the consistent pattern of deliberate killing, beating and threatening civilians, detention, looting properties and systematic destruction of Georgian houses and other acts were committed with a view to forcibly expelling ethnic Georgians from the territory of South Ossetia in furtherance of the overall objective to change the ethnic composition of the territory and sever any remaining links with the other parts of Georgia. The Chamber highlights that "the de facto leadership of South Ossetia reportedly acknowledged some aspects of the policy of expulsion, in particular the deliberate destruction of civilian homes in order to prevent the return of the ethnic Georgian population."[26]

The Chamber also notes that during the 2008 armed conflict, based on the available information, the crimes committed against ethnic Georgians "resulted in 51-113 killings, the destruction of over 5,000 dwellings and the forced displacement of 13,400-18,500 persons constituting, in the estimation of the Prosecutor, a 75% decrease in the ethnically Georgian population in South Ossetia."[27]

* * *

Over the past 25 years the Russian Federation has conducted a systematic policy against the national sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Georgia. The letters distributed by the Russian Delegation to the United Nations constitute an attempt to acquire "legitimacy" for Russia's illegal and illegitimate activities, which we strongly believe will be rejected by the international community.

As a peace-loving nation, Georgia stands ready to settle the conflict with the Russian Federation by exclusively peaceful means, in accordance with relevant international agreements and with full respect for the fundamental principles of international law. To this end, on several occasions, Georgia has committed itself to the unilateral legally binding non-use of force pledge, whereas the Russian Federation continues to be reluctant to reciprocate. The withdrawal of Russia's occupation forces from Georgia would be the most important stage toward a comprehensive settlement of the Russo-Georgian conflict.

As concerns the relations with our compatriots living in the occupied territories, the ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians are an integral part of our common history and future, despite the current artificial barriers. There is no alternative to the return of the IPDs and refugees to their homes and to the full re-integration of all ethnicities into a vibrant society where human rights and individual freedoms as

[25] ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I Decision #ICC-01/15; 27.01.2016, para. 27.
[26] ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I Decision #ICC-01/15; 27.01.2016, para. 21.
[27] ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I Decision #ICC-01/15; 27.01.2016, para. 54.

well as cultural and linguistic diversity of different communities are the Georgian State's top priorities.

New York, May 31 2016

United Nations A/70/912

General Assembly

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Seventieth session
Agenda item 28
Social development

Letter dated 31 May 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Belarus, Egypt and Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Writing on behalf of the 25 States Members of the United Nations that comprise the Group of Friends of the Family (Bangladesh, Belarus, the Comoros, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe), we have the honour to transmit a statement in support of the family (see annex) that was adopted at a special high-level event entitled "Uniting nations for a family-friendly world", held at United Nations Headquarters on 16 May 2016.

We would appreciate it if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 28.

(*Signed*) Andrei **Dapkiunas**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Belarus
to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Amr Abdellatif **Aboulatta**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Egypt
to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Alya Ahmed Saif **Al-Thani**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Qatar
to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 31 May 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Belarus, Egypt and Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Special high-level event: "Uniting nations for a family-friendly world"

United Nations Headquarters, 16 May 2016

Statement in support of the family

We, the members of the Group of Friends of the Family, comprising the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Republic of Belarus, the Union of the Comoros, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Iraq, the State of Kuwait, the Kyrgyz Republic, Libya, Malaysia, Nicaragua, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Sultanate of Oman, Pakistan, the State of Qatar, the Russian Federation, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of the Sudan, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Republic of Uganda, the Republic of Yemen and the Republic of Zimbabwe, having met on 16 May 2016 at United Nations Headquarters in New York at the special high-level event, "Uniting nations for a family-friendly world", dedicated to the International Day of Families,

1. *Recognize* that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State, as envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and binding international instruments, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

2. *Acknowledge* that the family plays a key role in development and, as such, should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members;

3. *Recognize* the family as uniquely suited to advance the social and economic well-being of all its members, as well as society at large, and recognize also, in particular, that the family has the responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children and that children, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding;

4. *Stress* that the family, as the natural environment for the growth and economic well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, should be assisted and protected so that it may fully assume its responsibilities within the community;

5. *Highlight* the role of family members, especially parents and other legal guardians, in strengthening the self-image, self-esteem and status of girls and boys and in protecting their health and well-being;

6. *Stress* that equality between women and men and women's equal participation in employment and shared parental responsibility are essential elements of a policy on the family;

7. *Note* that the family, while respect for the rights of its members is ensured, is a strong force for social cohesion and integration and intergenerational solidarity and development, and that the family plays a crucial role in the

preservation of cultural identity, traditions, morals, heritage and the values system of society;

8. *Underline* the importance of strengthening intergenerational partnerships and solidarity among generations, and stress the need in this regard to promote opportunities for voluntary, constructive and regular interaction between young people and older generations in the family, in the workplace and in society at large;

9. *Recognize* that stable, supportive and nurturing family relationships, supported by communities and, where available, professional services, can provide a vital shield against substance abuse, particularly among minors;

10. *Note with concern* that the contribution of the family in society continues to be largely overlooked and underemphasized, and note the potential of the family to contribute to national deve'opment and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies;

11. *Remain convinced* that the family can also contribute to eradicating hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;

12. *Acknowledge* the role that the family plays as a contributor to sustainable development, and stress that it will be impossible to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its promise that "no one will be left behind" unless the family is empowered to effectively fulfil its role within society;

13. *Recognize* the important role of civil society, including research institutes and academia, in advocacy, promotion, research and policymaking and, as appropriate, the evaluation of family policy development and capacity-building;

14. *State* our disappointment regarding the attempts to withdraw the theme of the family from the United Nations agenda for the sake of controversial issues;

15. *Invite* the Secretary-General, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations organizations, agencies and entities, including relevant special procedures mandate holders and treaty bodies, within their respective mandates and competence, to pay due attention in their work to the protection of and assistance to the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society and to refrain from any inherent controversial actions that depart from the widely accepted family concept;

16. *Express* our full support for the annual Group of 77 and China initiative on the International Year of the Family, to be presented at the seventy-first session of the General Assembly;

17. *Commit* ourselves to working together with other Member States, the United Nations and civil society to protect the family everywhere and to adopt pro-family policies at all levels to secure a safer and more prosperous future for the family and all its members, in particular children;

18. *Decide* to remain seized of the matter.

United Nations A/70/913

General Assembly

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Agenda item 20
Sustainable development

Letter dated 2 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you information on the results of socioeconomic development achieved by the Republic of Uzbekistan throughout the years of independence (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 20.

(*Signed*) Muzaffar **Madrakhimov**

16-09018 (E) 080616 100616

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Annex to the letter dated 2 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Results of socioeconomic development achieved by the Republic of Uzbekistan since independence

The national model for reform and development, which was devised by President Islam Karimov of the Republic of Uzbekistan and which takes the country's socioeconomic potential, the Uzbek people's history of statehood and our national values and global experience into account, is underpinned by five fundamental principles for the transition to a socially oriented-free market economy.

The first principle is that the economy takes priority over politics. In other words, economic reforms should be free of any dogma, precepts or outdated stereotypes and should not subject to any ideology.

The second principle is that the State is the main reformer. It must determine the main priorities, areas and stages for reform and also draw up and consistently implement public development programmes.

The third principle is that the rule of law prevails in all sectors of society. The Constitution and the laws, which have been adopted democratically, must be respected by all without exception.

The fourth principle involves conducting a strong social policy. Alongside the introduction of a market economy, effective measures must be taken to provide reliable social protection for the population, especially low-income and large families and people of pensionable age.

The fifth principle is that the transition to a market economy is an evolutionary process which incorporates objective economic patterns in a consistent and methodical way at every stage.

As a result of its national model for the modernization of society and social renewal, known as the Uzbek development model, and thanks to the consistent implementation of wide-ranging reforms in all sectors since independence, Uzbekistan has fundamentally restructured its economy and a reliable foundation has been established for sustainable economic growth.

The national economy has grown by five and a half times over this short period of history. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, based on purchasing power parity, has quadrupled over this period and now stands at almost $7,000, while the population has more than doubled. The State budget has been implemented with a surplus since 2005, which has helped to strengthen macroeconomic stability.

The achievement of sustainable economic growth and balance in key macroeconomic indicators, especially at the height of the global financial and economic crisis, demonstrates that the critical priorities and challenges of the country's socioeconomic development have been effectively and efficiently addressed.

Annual capital investments consistently exceed 23 per cent of GDP, thus providing a foundation for future economic growth. Investments in productive sectors of the economy have led to the establishment of entirely new industries inside the country such as automobile manufacturing, petrochemical production, oil and gas equipment manufacturing, modern construction materials production, railroad equipment manufacturing, consumer electronics, pharmaceuticals and modern food and textile industries.

Currently over 60 per cent of industrial production comes from high-technology sectors that were established virtually from scratch following independence, and from competitive and high value-added products placed on the global market. An important fact is that these industries are planning more advanced processing of raw materials inside the country in order to produce items with higher added value.

The structural reforms carried out within the engineering industry deserve special attention.

A modern automotive industry has been established with technology leaders in their fields, such as General Motors (manufacturing light vehicles), Isuzu (manufacturing medium-sized buses and trucks) and MAN (manufacturing heavy goods vehicles). A project to roll out large-sized buses is also being prepared.

In the area of agricultural engineering, high-technology industries have been established with Claas, Case New Holland and Lemken, leading global manufacturers in the production of modern tractors, air lifts, cotton harvesters and tractor-mounted and other equipment.

In the field of electrical engineering, a wide range of electronic and electrical household equipment has been manufactured in conjunction with LG, Samsung and Honeywell. Recently, following a critical assessment of all markets within the Commonwealth of Independent States, Motorola selected Uzbekistan as a base for the production of its smartphones.

Since independence, programmes have been implemented to ensure energy independence and to develop the oil and gas refining sectors. In that context, the Bukhara Refinery, the Shurtan and Ustyurt Gas Chemical Complexes, the Kungrad Soda Plant, the Dekhkanabad Potash Fertilizer Plant and a number of other high-technology industries have been built in partnership with foreign companies.

At the same time, policy measures have been actively implemented in Uzbekistan in recent years for the modernization and technical and technological renewal of the economy, and to increase the efficiency of production. Labour productivity increased by a factor of 2.3 between 2000 and 2015 as a result of these measures.

The Republic of Uzbekistan Reconstruction and Development Fund, which was established in 2006 and whose authorized capital currently totals $25 billion, plays an important role in implementing projects to modernize and technically upgrade the main sectors of the economy and in carrying out effective structural and investment policies.

The establishment of the Fund was an important step in attracting major foreign investors and lenders, building their confidence in unconditional project

delivery and developing accountability among Uzbek partners for the successful implementation of investment projects.

The Fund's active involvement in preparing and implementing new projects has already attracted over $10 billion in foreign investment and loans, in the form of co-financing from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, financial institutions in Japan, the Republic of Korea and China and also from other foreign banks and investors.

This industrial policy has been stimulated by a programme for the localization of finished products, component parts and materials. Over 2,800 localization projects were implemented between 2000 and 2015 and, within that framework, more than 4,800 new types of products were manufactured that had previously been imported. The companies involved have created over 22,900 new jobs. Consequently, the manufacture of localized products over this period has increased by more than 225 times and now accounts for 20 per cent of industrially manufactured products, while annual import substitution is over $6.2 billion.

As a result of large-scale industrial development, modernization and diversification programmes in the country, industrial production has increased by a factor of more than 4.4 since independence. Before 1991, the structure of the Uzbek economy was dominated by agriculture, while industry (in which the predominant sectors were cotton processing and machine building for the agricultural industry) accounted for about 14 per cent. Today, however, the share of GDP represented by the industrial sector has increased to almost 24.3 per cent. Furthermore the average growth rate of industry over the last 10 years has been 9.3 per cent, which exceeds GDP growth.

Industrial diversification since independence has also led to a significant change in the exports of Uzbekistan. In the early 1990s the country's exports depended on cotton, which had a 60 per cent share of exports. Today, however, almost 80 per cent of the country's exports are manufactured goods and cotton accounts for no more than six per cent. Today Uzbek manufacturers export to 160 countries, including European countries, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia, North and South America, Africa and Australia.

As a result of ongoing measures to strengthen its export capacity, exports from Uzbekistan have increased by more than 29 times. Global crises notwithstanding, Uzbekistan has achieved a stable trade surplus over the past 15 years.

The structure of agricultural production has fundamentally changed since independence. Lopsided agricultural development during the period of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the dissolution of economic ties led to the country being on the verge of a food crisis in its first days of independence. Staple food products, including grains, cereals, meat, dairy products, eggs, sugar and oil, were imported.

To address the food problem, cultivated areas for cotton were halved within a short period of time and the land gained has been used to grow food crops, including grains, horticultural goods, potatoes, grapes, melons and fodder crops.

The factor of crucial importance for agricultural reform was the transition from a system of administrative planning and distribution to a market economy. Agricultural land was once again transferred to newly established private farms, and

plots of land were leased to them on a long-term basis. Sound market infrastructure was put in place to provide the farms with all of the various services that they need.

Accordingly, cereal production since independence has increased from less than 1 million tons to over 7.5 million tons, transforming the country into a net exporter of wheat. Today Uzbekistan produces about 18.7 million tons of horticultural goods, whereas around 4 million tons were grown in 1991.

Owing to the structural changes made, cotton currently does not exceed 7.7 per cent of total output in the agricultural sector, cereals represent around 9 percent, horticultural crops and grapes total 32.4 per cent, potatoes account for 9.9 per cent and livestock is over 40 per cent.

Since independence, there has been a significant increase in the volume and range of manufactured foodstuffs as a result of the measures taken to ensure food security in the country. Whereas in 1990 food imports met a significant proportion of the population's needs, today 96 per cent of food is produced by domestic companies. Over the years the per capita consumption of meat has increased by a factor of 1.3, that of milk and dairy products by a factor of 1.6, and that of potatoes by a factor of 1.7. At the same time, vegetable consumption has more than doubled and fruit consumption has almost quadrupled.

Major projects have been implemented in the years since independence to upgrade and develop road transport infrastructure. As part of public road improvement projects, more than 3,000 km of roads have been constructed or renovated over the last five years, including a 1,500 km stretch of the Uzbek National Highway.

A unique road that meets the highest international standards was commissioned across the Kamchik Pass, connecting the Fergana Valley with the central part of the country via two tunnels.

New railway sections have been built, including along the Navoi-Uchkuduk-Sultanuizdag-Nukus line (342 km), on a bridge crossing over the Amudarya river and along the Tashguzar-Boisun-Kumkurgan route (223 km in length and travelling through a mountain pass 1,500 m above sea level) which leads to the northern borders of Afghanistan.

The Tashkent-Samarkand line (345 km), the Tashkent-Khodzhikent line (66 km) and the Tukimachi-Angren line (114 km) have been electrified. Fast-speed passenger trains have begun operating on the Samarkand-Karshi section of railway line, which has led to "Afrosiyob" high-speed trains running between Tashkent and Karshi. The completion the new electrified railway line between Angren and Pap (123 km, with a tunnel over 19 km), whose construction began at the start of 2013, is important for the development of a transnational transport corridor.

There are now more than 20 international transport corridors in Uzbekistan, including two major international highways linking Western European countries to East Asian countries.

As part of the development and renewal of air transport in Uzbekistan, state-of-the-art service equipment has been commissioned for aircraft manufactured in the West, airports have been renovated and the navigation system has been improved throughout Uzbekistan, which is recognized as having one of the best of air traffic control systems in the Commonwealth of Independent States. The fleet

today consists exclusively of modern aircraft from the leading global manufacturers, Airbus and Boeing. Aircraft with the flag of Uzbekistan fly to over 40 airports in Europe, Asia and North America.

The structural transformation and diversification of the economy has been underpinned by steadily increasing the resource base of banks, by expanding the proportion of long-term funding sources and by enhancing the role of commercial banks in these processes. Loans for periods exceeding three years represented around 24 per cent of the total loan portfolio in 1990, whereas today these total 80 per cent.

As a result of steady growth in the total capital of commercial banks and balanced asset portfolio management policies, the capital adequacy ratio is three times higher than the international standards of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision.

For the fifth consecutive year Moody's international rating agency has evaluated development prospects for the banking system in Uzbekistan as "stable". To date, all commercial banks in the Republic have been assigned a "stable" rating by Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch Ratings, the leading international rating companies.

In recent years small business and private enterprise have rightly emerged as the driving force behind Uzbekistan's economic growth. While there were almost no small businesses inside the country prior to independence, today 56.7 per cent of GDP comes from small business. Today over 90 per cent of all businesses are small businesses.

The size and importance of this sector of the economy have grown through domestic measures that provide broad support for the development of small business and private enterprise. Such measures improve the business environment, establish reliable systems for the protection of private property rights and guarantees, and reduce the tax burden.

As a result of the progressive reduction of tax rates, the broadening of the tax base and the liberalization of tax administration since independence, the total tax burden on the economy has declined from over 45 per cent to 20 per cent, and the single tax payment for small businesses has decreased by over two thirds, from 15.2 per cent to 5 per cent.

Today Uzbekistan has almost fully reviewed its legal and regulatory framework for entrepreneurial activities. In the past four years alone more than 15 laws aimed at enhancing the role and protection of private property have been adopted, while 186 authorization and licensing procedures and over 70 forms of statistical and tax reporting have been revoked.

At the legislative level, the unique principle of the priority rights of entrepreneurs, including foreign investors, has been introduced in their relations with public, law enforcement and monitoring bodies. An open and transparent mechanism has also been introduced for the broad involvement of business entities in public procurement.

Tax and statistical reporting procedures and customs clearance procedures have been transformed into fully electronic systems. An e-government system that is

being actively implemented on the basis of international best practices will be fully completed by 2020.

The main objectives of the new phase of reforms include creating an enabling environment for broad foreign direct investment, fundamentally enhancing the efficiency and openness of joint-stock companies, and introducing modern corporate governance methods. Today more than 5,000 successful enterprises have been established in Uzbekistan by investors from over 90 countries.

Uzbekistan has created the most favourable conditions to attract foreign capital. The broad system of different benefits, privileges and guarantees for foreign companies investing in the country's economy is essentially unique. In particular, the State guarantees that following changes in tax legislation foreign investors may abide by the earlier norms and provisions for a period of 10 years.

Services have become the most promising and dynamic sector of the economy of Uzbekistan since independence. In the early 1990s services represented around 33 per cent of the economy, whereas today they account for 54.5 per cent of GDP. In addition, new and modern types of services have emerged, such as digital information and communications technologies, mobile services, computer programming services, consulting, legal and audit services, real estate and brokering services, private health care, vehicle insurance and new types of financial services, including leasing and electronic banking.

A large-scale national staff training programme was adopted and launched in 1997. This was anchored in the concept of comprehensively restructuring the longstanding educational system, ensuring continuing education and linking the educational system to ongoing societal transformation and the demands of a growing economy for highly qualified personnel.

The programme introduced 12 years of universal compulsory free education: nine years of comprehensive school education followed by three years of training in a specialized vocational college or academic high school, where every student receives vocational training in two to three specialities in demand on the labour market.

Under the programme more than 1,600 new vocational colleges and academic high schools have been built and equipped with modern laboratory, computer and production equipment over the years. Decisive measures have also been taken to update the quality and methodology of the teaching and learning process.

In addition, steps have been taken to further develop and improve the training of young professionals in higher educational institutions. Over the years their number has doubled and today there are more than 260,000 students at 68 universities and higher educational institutions. The higher education system has transitioned to the two-stage international standard of undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

In order to train young professionals to the highest international standards of education, branches of leading universities with high international standing in Europe and Asia have been established and are operating in the Republic, such as the Westminster International University, the Management Development Institute of Singapore, the Turin Polytechnic University, the Republic of Korea Inha University in Tashkent and a number of leading Russian universities.

There has been a steady decline in infant and maternal mortality rates thanks to public policy measures aimed at mother, child and health protection. Since independence, the overall infant mortality rate has decreased from 34.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 10.8 in 2014, and maternal mortality has fallen from 65.3 to 19.1 deaths per 100,000 live births.

A central focus has always been placed on consistently improving the standard of living and quality of life of the Uzbek people. Annual expenditure from the State budget to meet social needs, including measures to secure funds for the social services sector and enhance the effectiveness of social welfare, increased from 31.5 per cent in 1990 to 59 per cent at the end of 2015.

In addition to undertaking major construction and renovation work at educational institutions and fitting them out with modern equipment, significant attention is being paid to the harmonious development of young people. In the last five years alone over 270 children's music and art schools, 523 sporting facilities and more than 100 swimming pools have been constructed or renovated.

Today more than 2 million children, including 840,000 girls, regularly take part in various types of sports classes. Over the past 10 years the number of children between 6 and 15 years of age participating in sports has increased from 20.4 to 55.8 per cent.

Uzbekistan is now entering a new phase of economic reforms and structural changes, which is aimed at ensuring sustainable development for the country in the years to come.

In early 2015, based on a thorough analysis of the processes under way in the global economy, President Islam Karimov developed and approved a programme for the period 2015 to 2019 that sets out seven key areas for further reform, structural transformation and diversification of the economy. These key areas are as follows:

1. Downsizing the public sector and further expanding the size and significance of private property via:

(a) The privatization of 1,035 State companies and State-owned entities, including 452 at zero purchase price;

(b) The closure of 256 obsolete and inefficiently run State-owned enterprises;

(c) The demolition of 354 unused and State-owned entities, with business entities receiving 119 hectares of the available land plots on a competitive basis.

The private sector will consequently increase in size, from its present 82 per cent of the economy to 86 per cent. This will provide a decisive impetus to boost economic performance.

2. Dramatically improving the business environment, allowing greater freedom of entrepreneurship and prioritizing the development and strengthening of legal protection for private property by:

(a) Simplifying procedures for entrepreneurial activity through the widespread introduction of information and communications technologies in public service delivery;

(b) Enhancing transparency mechanisms for private entrepreneurs to gain access to raw materials, primarily by expanding their sale through open tenders and trade fairs;

(c) Strengthening the accountability of public officials and law enforcement and monitoring bodies for unlawful interference in the work of business entities.

3. Introducing modern corporate governance methods and increasing incentives for the executive bodies of publicly traded companies to improve their performance by:

(a) Improving the organizational structure of joint-stock companies and introducing modern requirements for the management of personnel;

(b) Involving highly-skilled foreign managers and specialists;

(c) Conducting a mandatory audit of the financial and economic activities of companies, in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards;

(d) Enhancing the role of minority shareholders in the management of companies.

4. Bringing about a structural transformation of the economy and upgrading and diversifying industrial production by implementing 846 investment projects, worth $41 billion, for the modernization and technical and technological renewal of production. This will help to launch the production of over 100 new commodity groups and more than 1,000 assortment types, and to increase industrial production by one and a half times.

5. Fostering the localization of finished products, component parts and materials and, on that basis, reducing economic dependence on imports by:

(a) Implementing over 600 localization projects worth over $5 billion between 2015 and 2019;

(b) Manufacturing 1,225 of the most sought after types of products, including 580 new products;

(c) Reducing imported materials and components for key industrial sectors by up to 40 per cent by 2020 and saving around $6 billion in hard currency.

6. Further developing and upgrading the communications and road transport infrastructure. This includes implementing projects worth about $10 billion between 2015 and 2019 in the following areas:

(a) Building and renovating over 2,700 km of public roads, including a 1,800 km stretch of the Uzbek National Highway;

(b) Developing and rehabilitating 960 km of railway lines and electrifying 885 km of railroads;

(c) Building and rehabilitating 8,600 km of water networks and 358 km of sewage networks;

(d) Upgrading 25,300 km of distribution networks and over 5,600 km of electricity supply lines;

(e) Developing telecommunications infrastructure, increasing optical communication lines by a factor of 1.7 and extending the coverage of mobile network coverage for localities from 80 to 95.3 per cent.

7. Reducing energy intensity; introducing energy-saving technologies in all sectors of the economy and in the social sector through the gradual modernization and renovation of central (district) and local heat supply companies; replacing and installing heating boilers in not-for-profit organizations; and replacing pumps and electric motor pump units at water agencies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Management.

Furthermore, in order to deepen economic agricultural reforms, a programme of measures was adopted in late 2015 for further agricultural reform and development for the period 2016 to 2020. Under the programme 170,500 hectares of cultivated areas for cotton and 50,000 hectares of grain and cereal crops are gradually being optimized by withdrawing marginally profitable land and increasing the planting of horticultural crops, potatoes, melons, oilseeds and fodder crops, and by increasing livestock by a factor of 1.3, small ruminants by a factor of 1.2 and poultry by a factor of 1.5.

The services sector development programme for 2016 to 2020, which was adopted this year and seeks to increase services by a factor of 1.8, is particularly noteworthy. This would raise the services sector of the economy in Uzbekistan to 48.7 per cent (according to the international methodology for calculating GDP) by:

(a) Creating conditions for accelerated development of the services sector and structural transformations through the construction of communications and road transport infrastructure and the introduction of modern information and communications technology sectors;

(b) Establishing a competitive environment and encouraging small and private entrepreneurship;

(c) Expanding a variety of innovative services and new communication tools;

(d) Maintaining the technical capacity for public access telecommunications networks, providing quality services for them, fully transitioning to digital telephone and television systems, and increasing telecommunications services to 2.5 per cent of the economy in Republic by 2020;

(e) Developing financial services, introducing new electronic payment technologies and further developing high-technology health-care services.

A steady increase in the well-being, standard of living and quality of life of the people will always remain the highest priority in the development of Uzbekistan. In that regard every year some 1 million new jobs are being created, including over 60 per cent of in rural areas, 12,000 modern rural houses are being built, the rural infrastructure is being developed and village appearance is being transformed.

Few countries in the world today have such economic indicators. Uzbekistan ranks fifth in the world among States with rapidly growing economies, something which quite rightly is highly appreciated by the international community and international financial institutions. In September 2015, the International Monetary Fund issued a press release on our country, noting that Uzbekistan has retained its economic resilience in a difficult global economic environment, that it has achieved strong economic growth over a long period, and that its active investment policies and structural reforms are reliably protecting the country from the economic slowdown occurring in other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

United Nations A/70/914–S/2016/514

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Security Council

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6 June 2016

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General Assembly
Seventieth session
Agenda item 34 (a)
Prevention of armed conflict: prevention of armed conflict

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Letter dated 24 May 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from the Government of Ukraine, I have the honour to transmit a commentary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the visit of the Head of Government of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, to the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Ukraine) (see annex).

I would appreciate your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 34 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yuriy **Vitrenko**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 24 May 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Commentary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on the visit of the Head of Government of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, to the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Ukraine)

24 May 2016

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine expresses its protest against the visit, uncoordinated with Ukraine, of the Head of Government of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, to the sovereign territory of Ukraine in its internationally recognized borders, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

The visit of Mr. Medvedev to the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea is a clear disregard by the Russian authorities for the sovereignty of Ukraine, proof of violations by the Russian Federation of the Charter of the United Nations and norms and principles of international law, and conscious defiance by this State of its international obligations.

All responsibility for this and other violations lies with the Russian Federation as an occupying State according to the provisions of international law, its officials, as well as illegal "bodies of Crimea" and its representatives that adopt illegal decisions and perform unlawful actions.

United Nations A/70/915–E/2016/76

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

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General Assembly
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Agenda item 108
Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Economic and Social Council
2016 session
24 July 2015-27 July 2016
Agenda item 17
Non-governmental organizations

Identical letters dated 26 May 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Economic and Social Council

On instructions from my Government, my country's mission would like to draw your attention to the following:

At its current resumed session, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is considering the application of the Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Association for consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In July 2015, my country's mission submitted to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities the following information confirming that this so-called charitable association provides support and financing to terrorism:

> The Sheikh Eid Association of Qatar has been transferring funds to armed terrorist groups in Syria, including the terrorist organizations Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front. The Association's stated aim is to assist displaced Syrian children and youths living in neighbouring States, and to provide financing to build a generation educated according to curricula designed by the funding providers.
>
> The Association's operations in Turkey are managed by a Qatari national, Sheikh Abbad al-Misnad (Abu Ahmad). In Jordan, he is assisted by the Qatari national Khayrat Hamad al-'Ali. In early March 2015, the Association sent $10 million for the terrorist Nusrah Front in the countryside of Idlib governorate. It also sent $10 million for the leadership of ISIL in the countryside of Aleppo governorate. The money was received by the terrorist Muhammad Abdulwahid Arran.

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During the same month, the terrorist Umar Husayn As'ad al-Mukahhal received $5 million from the Association. The sum was sent with the terrorist Muhammad Jamal al-Dakhil from the A'zaz area. Al-Mukahhal announced the news to the terrorists who were with him on 12 May 2015. He read out a letter stating that they should withdraw from Bi'r al-Qasab and surrounding areas and go to Raqqah governorate, where they would relieve other terrorist groups that had deployed to Tadmur (Palmyra).

Under the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31, a consultative relationship between the United Nations and a non-governmental organization may not be granted to organizations involved in criminal activity. Since the Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Association supports and finances terrorism under the guise of charitable work, which is a violation of United Nations counter-terrorism resolutions, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic strenuously objects to granting it consultative status, and calls on you to take immediate measures to prevent that.

I should be grateful if this letter could be issued as a document of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

United Nations A/70/916

General Assembly

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7 June 2016

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Seventieth session
Agenda item 73 (d)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Letter dated 3 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the declaration of the international conference entitled "Chernobyl 30 years later: from an emergency to a revival and sustainable social and economic development of affected territories", held in Minsk on 25 April 2016 (see annex).

I should appreciate it if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 73 (d).

(*Signed*) Andrei **Dapkiunas**

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Annex to the letter dated 3 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Declaration

Chernobyl 30 years later: from an emergency to a revival and sustainable social and economic development of affected territories

We, the participants in the international conference entitled "Chernobyl 30 years later: from an emergency to a revival and sustainable social and economic development of affected territories", held in Minsk on 25 April 2016, representing Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and other States (see enclosure), as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the European Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the Union State of Belarus and Russia, the World Bank and the World Health Organization,

Having considered the accumulated experience of overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster in the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and within the initiative of the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions (2006-2016) and other international and national programmes,

Having outlined further steps to overcome long-term consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, having discussed ways of strengthening international cooperation with regard to Chernobyl for the period after 2016,

Noting the progress made by the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the mitigation of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, the rehabilitation of the affected regions and the resolving of the corresponding medical, environmental and social problems,

At the same time expressing concern about the ongoing exposure of the population to radiation and the risks of developing diseases connected with the Chernobyl factor,

Noting the maintenance costs with regard to the environmental pollution and its negative influence on the economic capacity of territories with high levels of radioactive contamination,

Considering of very high importance the continuation of international cooperation in studying and eliminating of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster,

Greatly appreciating the coordinating role of the United Nations Development Programme in international cooperation with regard to Chernobyl, and noting the necessity of the continuation of such coordination, including by means of the

activity of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl with the involvement of interested organizations and countries,

Recognizing the importance of cooperation with international partners in the exchange of experience in mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, including by use of the Polesye State Radiation and Ecology Reserve as an international research site for the implementation of projects in the field of ecological and radiation safety,

Welcoming the efforts of the Government of Ukraine and the input and contributions made by States, international organizations and financial institutions to complete the construction of the shelter facility and related nuclear safety projects at Chernobyl, in accordance with international standards, so as to rehabilitate the site into a stable and environmentally safe condition, and urging relevant parties to ensure that a strong commitment remains in place to ensure the successful completion of this vital work,

Confirming the relevance of preservation and the distribution of the experience of overcoming the serious consequences of nuclear catastrophes in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030,

Emphasizing the importance of the preservation of existing and the formation of new partnerships for the encouragement of sustainable development in the affected regions, attraction of innovations and investments, development of a system of targeted high-tech and specialized medical care, a healthier affected population, improvement of the system of protective measures, creation of an effective information space on radiation safety, formation of a radioecological culture of the population and skills for safe living activity in affected territories,

Acknowledging the need for transition after 2016 to a new stage of cooperation with regard to Chernobyl under the auspices of the United Nations, and relying on the experience of multilateral interaction and the activity of partnerships created between 1986 and 2016,

Call upon United Nations Member States and their partners to develop and support the post-2016 international initiative on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Chernobyl affected areas through partnerships, innovation and investment, the coordination of the implementation of which should be exercised by the United Nations Development Programme in its capacity as the coordinating agency for United Nations activities on Chernobyl,

Consider the following tasks as priorities for international cooperation with regard to Chernobyl in the forthcoming years:

(a) Further joint efforts aimed at the rehabilitation and sustainable development of the affected territories;

(b) Distribution of unique knowledge and exchange of best practices in overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster;

(c) Continuation of programmes of international technical cooperation for the achievement of the sustainable economic, ecological and social development of the affected territories;

(d) Strengthening national capacities of prevention and response to emergencies, including radiological and environmental monitoring, timely forecasting of risks of emergencies and developing educational and training programmes;

(e) Strengthening of health-care systems in the affected regions, long-term medical monitoring of exposed populations and effective medical assistance to the high-risk groups, including children and women;

(f) Conducting epidemiological studies of the medical consequences of the Chernobyl disaster with a view to increasing the effectiveness of medical assistance to individuals residing in radioactive contaminated areas;

(g) Management of knowledge and informational support for the formation of practical skills for safe living for populations in the affected territories, with a special focus on children and women;

(h) Rehabilitation and return to economic use of agricultural and forest areas in the abandoned territories, for the manufacturing of safe and clean products;

(i) Development of infrastructure stimulating technological innovations and the introduction of environmentally friendly technologies adapted to application in the affected areas;

(j) Strengthening scientific and technical cooperation in the field of safe use of nuclear energy;

Encourage the implementation of a number of practical activities under international cooperation with regard to Chernobyl, including the following:

(a) Monitoring of the affected regions for an assessment of the efficiency of international aid to the affected States;

(b) Launching, in 2017, under the auspices of the United Nations, the initiative on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Chernobyl affected regions through partnerships, innovation and investment and an action plan for its realization;

(c) Establishment of an international scientific network to study the long-term medical, radioecological, radiobiological and other consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, with research sites being established on the basis of the profile of national scientific institutions;

(d) Establishment of regional centres with the aim of informing populations on issues of safe living activity;

(e) Carrying out a global information campaign to enhance awareness of the needs of people and territories affected by the Chernobyl disaster, including the development and use of Internet resources;

Welcome support and contributions to cooperation with regard to Chernobyl by States, international organizations, private partners and non-governmental organizations;

Ask the organizers of the international conference in Minsk to take the necessary measures for the distribution of the present declaration as a document of the General Assembly;

Express our gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Belarus for holding this conference.

Enclosure

Participants in the international conference Chernobyl 30 years later: from an emergency to revival and sustainable social and economic development of affected territories

Armenia

Austria

Azerbaijan

Belarus

Bulgaria

China

Cuba

Czech Republic

Estonia

France

Georgia

Germany

Hungary

Ireland

Italy

Israel

Japan

Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Latvia

Lithuania

Malta

Poland

Republic of Korea

Republic of Moldova

Romania

Russian Federation

Slovakia

Sweden

Switzerland

Tajikistan

Turkey

Turkmenistan

Ukraine

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

United States of America

United Nations A/70/917

General Assembly

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Seventieth session
Agenda item 124
Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/272. It is aimed at presenting as comprehensive an overview as possible of the ways in which the United Nations interacts with parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as the world organization of national parliaments with an explicit mandate to provide a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations. The report also provides a review of the work that the United Nations undertakes with regional parliamentary organizations and thematic networks of parliamentarians, many of which also formally engage with IPU. It covers the two years since the most recent report was issued (A/68/827) and presents the range of activities at the national, regional and global levels over the biennium 2014-2016.

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I. Introduction

1. There is a long and rich history of interaction and partnership between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). That comes from a recognition of the core functions of parliaments and parliamentary organizations and the added value and mutual benefits that those partnerships offer across a wide range of United Nations mandates and activities. In 2000, at the Millennium Summit, Heads of State and Government resolved to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments through IPU. That paved the way for IPU to have permanent observer status at the General Assembly and a more structured relationship between it, the United Nations and parliaments.

2. National parliaments and parliamentarians typically have at least four key functions: legislative, budgetary, oversight and representation. They are empowered with the authority to pass legislation; they authorize resource mobilization through national budgets; and they oversee resource mobilization and allocation through national budgets. When they are inclusive, accountable and effective, parliaments represent the peoples whom they serve. Working with parliaments can help to bring the work of the United Nations closer to people from all segments of society and, conversely, their voices into the decision-making process at the national, regional and global levels.

3. IPU has worked with the United Nations system to play a vital role as a convener of national parliaments and other parliamentary organizations, to discuss and help to formulate parliamentary input to major United Nations processes. Alongside other parliamentary organizations and networks, IPU also cooperates with the United Nations on a number of activities that cover the same broad scope of work as the United Nations — from human rights to human health, gender equality, sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, peace and security and beyond. During the reporting period, IPU and other parliamentary organizations helped to bring the voices of people, through their parliamentarians, to the United Nations in the context of consultations on the post-2015 development agenda and to such bodies as the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on the Status of Women and the World Health Assembly.

4. As a result of the growing realization of their key roles, recent landmark United Nations agreements have included explicit references to the role of parliaments. National parliaments are highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 70/1 on 25 September 2015, which underlines their "essential role". The 2030 Agenda also encourages Member States to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels that are country-led and country-driven" and concludes that national parliaments can support those processes. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, adopted on 18 March 2015, highlights the role of parliamentarians and IPU in supporting and advocating disaster risk reduction and the strengthening of national legal frameworks. Parliamentarians and parliamentary organizations contributed to the preparatory work for both agreements and have committed themselves to supporting their implementation.

5. The present report provides a description of the work that the United Nations undertakes in support of national parliaments (sect. II), with IPU and other parliamentary organizations (sect. III), and to build these partnerships further (sect. IV). The conclusion (sect. V) includes recommendations.

II. United Nations and national parliaments: direct support to parliaments and parliamentarians

6. Numerous entities from the United Nations system have provided support to many national parliaments over the reporting period. In the present section, some of the main areas of interaction between the United Nations and parliaments are laid out thematically. It is not meant as an exhaustive list, but rather as indicative of the breadth and richness of the cooperation.

2030 Agenda and climate change

7. Parliamentarians will have an extremely important role to play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They will need to adopt or amend legislation, allocate a specific budget for implementation, exercise oversight over the executive branch for compliance and promote regional and international cooperation in support of implementation.

8. For parliaments to exercise their role, Governments will need to adapt the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals to their national circumstances. The Goals and their targets also need to be integrated into the legislation submitted to or developed by parliaments. That is already happening in the area of climate change: there has been a tremendous increase in the number of national laws and policies adopted alongside international agreements on climate change. A recent study of 98 countries and the European Union showed that there were 804 laws and policies relating to climate change at the end of 2014.[1]

9. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals can build on the experience gained in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. That is already happening in some ways: as was the case for the Millennium Development Goals, some parliaments have created dedicated committees on the Sustainable Development Goals, raising awareness, engaging with civil society and promoting the continuity of work on them through election cycles. In Pakistan, for example, the National Assembly set up a Goals secretariat in 2016, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Parliaments may also consider holding hearings on the Goals: for example, the International Development Committee of the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has held hearings on integrating the Goals into development cooperation.

10. Parliaments are well placed to promote the holistic vision of the Sustainable Development Goals for the world. Indeed, they will need to help to ensure "whole of government" responses that extend beyond delineated socioeconomic areas, both nationally and internationally, in international assistance budgets and programming. The United Nations system is also required to work in a more integrated way across its pillars in support of that holistic agenda.

11. The national voluntary reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development will be critical to moving the Goals forward. Bearing in mind that those reviews are led by States and will be conducted within the framework of national institutional and legal arrangements, Governments could be well served by

[1] See Michael Nachmany and others, *The 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study: a Review of Climate Change Legislation in 99 countries* (Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and Environment, the Global Legislators Organisation and IPU, 2015).

engaging parliaments in the national reviews of the forum, which should be inclusive national processes.

12. Given that parliaments are key partners in sustainable development, the World Bank has systematically included consultations with parliamentarians in its preparations for country engagement strategies or country partnership frameworks. Regarding transparency and accountability as central to achieving its twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity, the Bank has provided parliamentarians with free and open access to a comprehensive set of data on development in countries around the globe. That partnership has also been manifested through parliamentary conferences and workshops organized on the side-lines of the Bank and International Monetary Fund spring and annual meetings, bringing select parliamentarians to the Bank headquarters to engage with senior management from both institutions on pressing development issues.

Strengthening governance and parliamentary capacities

13. Parliaments play a pivotal role in delivering good governance, a prerequisite for development. Strengthening the capacities of national parliaments has therefore remained a priority for UNDP, the largest provider of technical assistance to parliaments worldwide, supporting one in three parliaments through some 70 current programmes. The UNDP parliamentary strengthening programming is part of its assistance for inclusive political processes, including support for elections, constitution-making processes, civic engagement and women's political participation and leadership. The programming focuses on building the capacity of parliamentarians and parliamentary committees on crucial sustainable development issues, including climate change, gender equality, HIV and AIDS and combating corruption. For example, in Bangladesh, India and Tunisia, UNDP, working with the parliamentary network Climate Parliament, has supported breakthrough renewable energy legislation and policies. In Chile, it supported the National Congress in promoting an integrity and anti-corruption agenda and the work of the bicameral commission on transparency of Congress. It has also worked with national parliaments to promote institutional reform through the development, implementation and evaluation of parliamentary strategic plans. In Bhutan, it has supported the development of strategic development plans by both the National Assembly and the National Council, as well as efforts to bring parliamentary work closer to the people, in particular through videoconferencing ("Virtual Zumdu"). IPU has worked closely with UNDP country offices, providing technical assistance and capacity-building programmes to national parliaments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Guinea-Bissau, Myanmar, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago and Tunisia.

14. UNDP has worked with parliaments to enhance the participation of women, young people and marginalized groups and to improve parliamentary communication and outreach activities so that people have greater opportunities to interact with their representatives. For example, it has contributed to strengthening the transparency, inclusion and representation of parliaments by training civil society organizations on best practice in popular participation in parliamentary processes, such as in Fiji and Madagascar. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Chile, UNDP has worked with the national parliaments to enhance the representation and participation of minorities and indigenous peoples. Working with the parliaments of Georgia and Ukraine, it has supported the adoption of

parliamentary openness action plans to further accountability, transparency, access to information and popular engagement in legislative processes.

15. Newly elected parliamentarians in many parts of the world have benefited from UNDP training courses on topics ranging from standing orders to human rights, budget control, review of finance laws, decentralization and preparation of parliamentarians for their first sitting. Capacity-building has been conducted in numerous countries, including Myanmar, the Niger and Tunisia.

16. Strengthening the capacity of the parliaments of developing countries is also a key aim of the World Bank. Leadership, Learning and Innovation, the knowledge-sharing arm of the Bank, has strengthened the capacity of parliaments in developing countries through structured learning events, knowledge exchanges and support for parliamentary networks. Over the past 10 years, it has trained more than 10,000 parliamentarians in partnership with parliamentary organizations. Programmes have focused on the budget cycle, parliamentary administration and the role of parliaments in curbing corruption, poverty reduction and in conflict-affected countries.

International peace and security

17. Parliaments are key partners for the United Nations, including when a particular country is facing a lapse or relapse into violence, or is in the midst of a violent crisis. In countries where preventing conflict is the priority, parliaments are key interlocutors as the envoys and representatives of the Secretary-General, United Nations special political missions and the Department of Political Affairs support the good offices role of the Secretary-General and engage in preventive diplomacy and maintaining peace, including by supporting the strengthening of national institutions. Parliamentarians have a potentially invaluable role to play in conflict prevention when they have strong relationships with constituencies, are equipped to identify lingering and emerging grievances and provide a voice for people who may otherwise feel voiceless and be tempted to turn to violence. Similarly, parliamentary oversight of government, crucial to promoting good governance, helps to ensure that Governments address the underlying conflict drivers in societies, such as inequalities and discrimination. In recognition of that, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel has worked with national parliaments as part of its preventive diplomacy efforts and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa has liaised with presidents of national assemblies during the facilitation of peace and transition processes and during political crises.

18. In contexts of continuing conflict, the United Nations, through its peace operations and country teams, can provide direct material support to ensure that parliaments have the basic tools to function. In Somalia, UNDP has supported the National Federal Parliament, state parliaments and the Somaliland Parliament to establish infrastructure (construction of an adequate security perimeter and office space) and fund strategically important running costs (communications and the Internet). Beyond material support, the United Nations has provided technical assistance, such as advice and training, often on key or particularly sensitive themes. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, with support from Headquarters, has provided expert advice on issues such as the division of power between the most senior offices and the roles and responsibilities of key federal institutions. Conflict contexts do not mean that United Nations assistance to

parliaments is limited to material or short-term support. In Afghanistan, UNDP has supported the parliament in its long-term institutional development by helping the various secretariats to generate a set of comprehensive recommendations aimed at improving the structures, processes and performance of the parliament.

19. Throughout all that work, cooperation with parliaments has provided excellent opportunities to advance the women and peace and security agenda. For example, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has assisted the Commission for Women of the lower house to push through the adoption of a law on the elimination of violence against women, while the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) have supported the establishment of a national network of women in the national parliament and the adoption by the parliament of the Canchungo Declaration of October 2014, which is aimed at raising awareness among national authorities of the need to adopt strategies for greater participation by women in politics and decision-making processes.

20. In terms of combating corruption, crime prevention and criminal justice, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has offered technical support in legislative processes by providing comments and submissions to draft bills on combating corruption, crime prevention and criminal justice. For example, the Nigerian parliament invited UNODC to make written and oral submissions during the public hearing of a public complaints commission bill in September 2014.

21. Parliaments also play a key role in the prevention of terrorism. In that regard, UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate have worked to raise awareness of the prominent role of parliamentarians in countering terrorism and violent extremism. UNODC has also supported parliamentary committees in the ratification of international conventions and protocols and their incorporation into national legislation, and works with parliamentarians to identify gaps in national legal frameworks and provide recommendations for the refinement of those laws.

Human rights

22. Human rights require legal protection and parliaments have a responsibility to enshrine those rights in national laws and ensure that the laws passed are compatible with human rights standards. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has worked with national parliaments in three main ways: by providing technical assistance, building capacity and undertaking advocacy initiatives. OHCHR has also played a strategic role in facilitating cooperation with civil society organizations and other key partners. Thematically, its work with national parliaments has typically included women's rights and gender issues, discrimination, the rights of indigenous peoples, natural resources and land management, military justice, transitional justice and the rights of victims. A key engagement has been advising parliaments on their role in preparing for examination by human rights mechanisms and in following up on their recommendations.

23. The work that OHCHR has undertaken with national parliaments spans the globe. Since 2014, it has worked with the National Assembly of Madagascar to establish a working group to coordinate responses to human rights violations and threats. That led the President of the Assembly to commit himself to creating a

human rights commission within the Assembly and he also appointed a human rights adviser in his office in 2014. In Georgia, in response to a request by the Chair of the legal committee of the parliament in 2015, OHCHR supported research on models of legal capacity of persons with disabilities and supported the process of finalization of the amendments package to the existing legislation relating to the legal capacity of persons with psychological disabilities. The amendments were passed in 2015.

24. Although the modalities for the universal periodic review did not foresee a formal role for parliamentarians, such a role does exist. Some 60 to 70 per cent of recommendations emanating from the review require parliaments to pass laws, ratify international human rights instruments, or oversee government action. In the framework of commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Human Rights Council, and in accordance with its resolution 30/14, the Council decided to convene a panel discussion in June 2016 to take stock of the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Council and the universal periodic review, and to identify ways to further enhance the interaction of parliaments with the Council and its mechanisms.

25. UNDP has also worked with national parliaments on human right issues. In Madagascar and Viet Nam, it helped to strengthen parliamentary capacity to review and adopt laws, in accordance with the recommendations of the universal periodic review. In Iraq, it helped to establish the first human rights civil society advisory board for the parliament, which includes 19 members of civil society organizations, including minorities, and represents all parts of Iraq. In Kyrgyzstan, it helped to implement and monitor courthouse accessibility, in compliance with the law on the rights and guarantees of persons with disabilities.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

26. Women's empowerment, including fair access to the political sphere as elected representatives in parliaments and the passing of laws and budgets that promote and address gender-specific priorities, will make a crucial contribution to the 2030 Agenda. UN-Women has supported 30 parliaments in becoming more gender-sensitive through targeted support to women's caucuses and gender equality committees. In Liberia, it launched the "HeForShe campaign", currently endorsed by the entire leadership of the national legislature, to promote a conducive environment for women's participation in parliament. In Ecuador, technical support to the parliamentary group for women's rights was provided to ensure harmonization of national legislation with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. UN-Women has built the capacities of elected women leaders through targeted training in 34 countries. In Malawi, it supported the establishment of a parliamentary women's caucus and provided training on negotiation skills for legal reform processes. In Afghanistan, it built the capacities of women parliamentarians to influence legal reforms, including laws on local government, public health and the family. In Algeria, the women's caucus successfully promoted gender equality provisions in the amended Constitution, including parity at all levels in public spheres.

27. Gender is at the core of UNDP work with parliaments and includes building the capacities of female aspirants, candidates, newly elected female parliamentarians and cross-party women's caucuses, and supporting the engagement of women's groups in

parliamentary processes, including law-making and budgeting. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the training of women parliamentarians and the creation of a women's parliamentary caucus contributed to an increase in the number of women participating in budget discussions from 13 in the 2013/14 budget session to 23 in the 2014/15 budget session. In Colombia, UNDP has supported efforts to enshrine the principles of parity, alternation and the universality of women's political participation in the Constitution. In the Republic of Moldova, it supported a gender audit of the parliament, the development of a parliamentary gender action plan and the establishment of a cross-party caucus of women parliamentarians.

28. Working with national parliaments on the issue of child marriage is a priority for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In 2014, it supported the parliament of Bangladesh in the adoption of a bill on the prevention of child marriage, which sets the minimum age of marriage for men at 21 years and for women at 18 years. In the same year, UNFPA worked with parliamentarians from Costa Rica as they presented a draft bill to raise the age of consent from 16 to 18 years. In 2015, the Chadian parliament approved a law against child marriage and the National Assembly of Ecuador revised the Civil Code, raising to 18 years the minimum age for civil marriage under article 83. In 2016, Zimbabwe, in an effort to prevent child marriage, passed a historic law that set the legal age of marriage at 18 years for everyone.

Health

29. Parliaments have a key role to play in relation to policy, law and the financing of government action on health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has provided technical support to parliaments for developing and implementing health-related multilateral agreements, declarations and other legislative tools. In Samoa, WHO provided technical support to the work of the Samoan Parliament Advocacy Group on Healthy Living and the WHO Regional Office for the Americas helped Suriname to embrace a "health in all policies" approach, after the National Assembly was briefed on creating better social conditions for health, in particular among the most vulnerable populations.

30. UNFPA has worked with several national parliaments to adopt, enact or review laws on harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, and to advocate universal access to sexual and reproductive health services. Thanks in part to UNFPA support, in the Gambia the President declared a ban on female genital mutilation in 2015, following the passing of a law in the parliament prohibiting the practice. In 2016, the Thai parliament adopted a bill on the prevention of and remedial measures for adolescent pregnancy, stipulating that young people between 10 and 19 years of age must be given access to reproductive health information and services, including comprehensive sex education.

31. UN-Women has worked to build alliances with parliamentarians in addressing the gender dimensions of HIV and AIDS. In Côte d'Ivoire, it supported the creation of a network of parliamentarians in the fight against HIV and AIDS and built the capacity of 50 parliamentarians, helping to develop a three-year plan for the network, which includes specific actions to address the intersections of gender-based violence and HIV. In Malawi, UN-Women engaged with the 32-member parliamentary women's caucus, which advocated the adoption of a marriage, divorce and family relations bill. The new law increases the age of marriage from 16 to 18 years.

III. United Nations, IPU and other parliamentary organizations: advancing global norms

32. As the world organization of parliaments, IPU plays a leading role in promoting the engagement of parliaments in United Nations processes and activities. To help to guide the partnership between the two organizations, IPU has established an internal committee, the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs, which serves as a forum to ensure regular interaction between the United Nations and the parliamentary community, review implementation of major international commitments and shape parliamentary input to United Nations processes. UNDP regularly takes part in and provides support for the meetings of the Committee. At the 134th IPU Assembly, held in Zambia in 2016, the Committee decided that it would review progress on the Sustainable Development Goals annually, in preparation for each high-level political forum. Beyond IPU, the United Nations works with a range of parliamentary organizations and networks at the regional level (for example, the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) and the European Parliament), organized around a theme (for example, with the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption or the Climate Parliament), or along cultural/linguistic lines (for example, with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the International Assembly of the French-speaking World).

33. The present section provides an overview of the main thematic areas around which the work of the United Nations with parliamentary organizations, including IPU, has been organized over the biennium 2014-2016.

2030 Agenda and climate change

34. IPU and other parliamentary organizations have played an important role in raising awareness of, and mobilizing political support among parliamentarians for, the Sustainable Development Goals and the closely related area of climate change. In the declaration made at the fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, held in New York in 2015, a strong pledge to implement the Goals was made. To build political momentum ahead of the landmark twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Paris in December 2015, the Secretary-General of IPU, at the invitation of the Executive Secretary of the secretariat of the Convention, addressed letters to 14 national parliaments urging them to speed up ratification of the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol. IPU and the French parliament organized a parliamentary meeting during the conference, which helped to galvanize political will for strong action on climate change in follow-up to the agreement.

35. One of the most pressing challenges for the recently adopted 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change is to launch them successfully at the national and regional levels, ensuring Member State ownership of the processes. Parliamentary organizations provide support and tools to assist parliaments in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. In that vein, delegates at the 132nd IPU Assembly, held in Viet Nam in 2015, agreed on the Hanoi Declaration, committing parliaments to translating the Goals into enforceable laws at the national level. At its 134th Assembly, IPU adopted an action plan to guide parliaments in responding to the Paris Agreement, along with the Goals and the Sendai Framework. The plan, developed with contributions from various United Nations entities, launched a comprehensive review of existing national legislative

responses to ensure consistency with international agreements. One expected outcome is that parliaments should, by the end of 2017, where appropriate, put forward any amendments to existing legislation and develop new legislation, to ensure that their legislative bases are consistent with the Paris Agreement.

36. The work in the run-up to and since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement has been significant and has involved a wide range of United Nations and parliamentary actors. UNDP and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association held an international parliamentary conference on sustainability, energy and development in March 2016 in London. The United Nations Environment Programme has partnered with parliamentary organizations as diverse as Parlatino and the Global Legislators Organisation, a group devoted to addressing legislative challenges to sustainable development. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization has worked extensively with the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean on sustainable energy, development, food security and the private sector in development. Moving forward, it will be necessary to strengthen the partnerships between the United Nations and parliamentary organizations to advance the implementation of those ambitious, cornerstone multilateral agreements.

International peace and security

37. The most effective way to advance treaties that underpin fundamental global norms on international peace and security, such as in the area of the regulation of conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction, is universal participation and rigorous implementation. In both respects, parliamentarians and parliamentary organizations are essential. Through information exchanges, outreach activities and capacity-building opportunities, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has collaborated with parliamentary groups, such as Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons and Parliamentarians for Global Action. In February 2016, as a first step to closer cooperation with IPU, the Office supported IPU and the parliament of Côte d'Ivoire to organize a parliamentary seminar aimed at encouraging African parliaments to promote the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004). The follow-up to the seminar is expected to be conducted at the 135th IPU Assembly and beyond.

38. Similarly, within the framework of Security Council resolution 2178 (2014), by which the Council condemned violent extremism and underscored the need to address the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate has established a partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. Mediterranean States continue to be affected by the threat of foreign terrorist fighters: several are countries of origin, transit or destination, or are located close to the conflict zones in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. The dialogue between the Executive Directorate and the Assembly has been conducted in close cooperation with the Office for Disarmament Affairs. More broadly, the Executive Directorate has worked closely with IPU, the Assembly and other parliamentary interlocutors to raise awareness among parliamentarians of the terrorist threat and of the requirements of relevant United Nations resolutions. In the same vein, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) worked with the European Parliament to hold a hearing in 2015 on the prevention of radicalization in the European Union.

39. Partnerships with parliamentary organizations have tended to focus on cross-cutting thematic issues, but they can also focus on specific cases or conflicts. In servicing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs has engaged with national and regional parliaments and parliamentary organizations throughout the world, in particular as they called upon their Governments to recognize the State of Palestine. Parliamentarians and parliamentary organizations have taken an active part in the international conferences and quarterly seminars held under the auspices of the Committee in support of the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to raise awareness of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Marking the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in 2014, the Department organized the United Nations International Meeting of Parliamentarians in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace on the theme of the role of parliamentarians in ensuring respect for international law.

Human rights

40. Enhancing the contribution of parliaments to the work of the Human Rights Council and its universal periodic review was a priority for OHCHR and IPU during the reporting period, based on a partnership formalized in 2014. With the support and collaboration of OHCHR, IPU held four regional parliamentary seminars, in Morocco, the Philippines, Romania and Uruguay, in 2014 and 2015 to familiarize parliamentarians with the Council and the universal periodic review. The good practice discussed at the regional seminars were presented at a side event during the twenty-ninth session of the Council, in June 2015, and a compilation of the good practice gathered in the course of the regional seminars will be released in 2016.

41. On the issues of protection of refugees and ending statelessness, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and IPU have partnered to build parliamentary awareness and action. For example, in November 2015 they organized a global conference for parliamentarians on nationality and statelessness, in cooperation with the parliament of South Africa. The conference adopted a plan of action for parliamentarians in support of the UNHCR campaign to end statelessness by 2024. UNHCR and IPU have also produced a new version of a handbook for parliamentarians on nationality and statelessness.

42. Beyond ensuring the ratification of treaties and holding Governments accountable for their human rights obligations, parliaments can also alert Governments to nascent tensions or react to indicators of escalation to prevent crises that might lead to violence. The Special Advisers to the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide and for the Responsibility to Protect have worked with parliaments to strengthen that function. In 2015 and 2016, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect met the Chairs and delegations of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament and its Subcommittee on Human Rights to discuss the follow-up to the recommendation of the European Parliament of 18 April 2013 on the position of the European Union on the responsibility to protect. In November 2015, the two Special Advisers, the Forum of Parliaments of Member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the parliament of Kenya organized a seminar for parliamentarians on the implementation of the Protocol on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination adopted by the Conference. The Office on the Prevention of Genocide also provided support

relating to the prevention of atrocity crimes for a network of parliamentarians of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations with responsibilities for human rights issues.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

43. Adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls was established as a key means of implementation under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, with obvious ramifications for parliaments. In that vein, UN-Women and IPU have continued and strengthened their collaboration. They convened an annual parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the fifty-ninth and sixtieth sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The meeting held during the fifty-ninth session was dedicated to the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and during the sixtieth session the meeting was focused on key forms of discrimination in laws that hamper the sustainable development agenda.

44. In commemoration of the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, UN-Women spearheaded a year-long campaign to renew commitment to the implementation of the Platform and its goals. In February 2015 in Santiago, UN-Women and the Government of Chile co-organized a high-level meeting for global leaders as part of the campaign. The Secretary-General joined Heads of State, ministers, parliamentarians, other senior United Nations officials, the Secretary-General of IPU and other leaders in signing a call to action to close remaining gaps and implement the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action.

45. During the 132nd IPU Assembly, in 2015, senior officials from UN-Women discussed the links between the 20-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, and the role of parliaments in effecting change and overseeing implementation. A joint IPU and UN-Women side event on the role of male parliamentarians in promoting and ensuring respect for women's rights served as a forum for male parliamentarians to join the UN-Women "HeForShe" campaign.

46. During the reporting period, several United Nations entities collaborated with the Women in Parliaments Global Forum. UN-Women and UNDP organized joint side events with the Forum on thematic topics, including lessons learned from the 20-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Recognizing that the rights of women can often be overlooked in a disaster context and that women tend to be categorized as vulnerable, rather than as potential responders and agents of change for risk reduction, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction established a partnership with the Forum, launching the first caucus of women in parliament for disaster risk reduction, committed to implementing the Sendai Framework, along with the education, health, poverty reduction and other goals of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, senior United Nations officials have taken part in the annual summits of the Forum.

Health

47. Health continues to be a major area of collaboration between the United Nations and parliamentary organizations. WHO and IPU have worked together on HIV and AIDS, maternal, newborn and child health, and the Ebola outbreak. Building on the IPU resolution on access to health as a basic right of 2012, WHO supported a study reviewing progress in its implementation, which was presented at the 132nd IPU Assembly. At the 134th Assembly, in 2016, IPU committed itself to aligning its resolution of 2012 with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, launched during the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. WHO offices have collaborated extensively with parliamentary organizations at the regional level; for example, the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific has begun working with the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarian Forum on Global Health, which was founded in 2015 as an association of national parliamentary health committees. A core component of that collaboration is to enforce and expand the rule of law in health governance.

48. Parliamentarians are vital to the full implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and to its successful integration into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In April 2014, at the sixth International Parliamentarians' Conference on the Implementation of the Programme of Action, organized by UNFPA in Sweden, parliamentarians from around the world commemorated the twentieth anniversary of the Conference and renewed their commitment to its agenda. The next International Parliamentarians' Conference will be held in 2017 and present an opportunity for parliamentarians to review the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to date.

49. UNFPA has also partnered with parliamentary organizations around the world to strengthen legislation on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. It has worked with parliamentarians from the countries of the Southern African Development Community, the East African Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to review laws and policies relating to adolescents and their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and to develop a legal framework for harmonizing laws and policies. In 2014, UNFPA collaborated with the Interparliamentary Assembly of the States Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States in developing a model law on reproductive health for those countries.

50. In July 2014, IPU and UNDP, in cooperation with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), held a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the twentieth International AIDS Conference to provide parliamentarians with a forum for an exchange of views on major issues affecting the response to AIDS and to launch a joint handbook for parliamentarians on HIV and AIDS.

Other areas of collaboration

51. Cooperation between the United Nations and parliamentary organizations covers a wide range of areas beyond those described above. The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations has consistently engaged with parliamentary bodies in carrying out its mandate to improve cross-cultural relations between diverse nations and communities. IPU was a regular contributor to the Group of Friends meetings of

the Alliance, especially at the ministerial level, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean has regularly attended global forums and other major events organized by the Alliance.

52. The Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth and the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development have established close collaboration with IPU through its Forum of Young Parliamentarians and have attended the annual IPU conferences of young parliamentarians throughout the reporting period. Young parliamentarians have taken an active part in United Nations youth events, including the Youth Forums of the Economic and Social Council in 2015 and 2016 and the Global Forum on Youth Peace and Security. IPU monitors and provides data and information on the participation of young people in parliaments to international agencies working for the promotion of youth participation.

53. UNESCO has worked closely with several parliamentary organizations, including the International Assembly of the French-speaking World, the Pan-African Parliament and the European Parliament, on a range of issues, including the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expression, freedom of expression and of the press and the protection of cultural heritage, including in conflict zones. In the area of science, technology and innovation, UNESCO supported the participation of a number of parliamentarians in the seventh World Science Forum, organized by UNESCO and its partners in Budapest in November 2015.

54. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has maintained an open dialogue with parliamentarians and parliamentary organizations. The Parliamentary Conference on WTO, organized jointly by IPU and the European Parliament, is a case in point. Sessions are organized each year and on the occasion of WTO ministerial conferences. In 2015, the Parliamentary Conference expressed strong support for the multilateral trading system. In an outcome document, parliamentarians from around the world called for prompt ratification of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, a redoubling of efforts to conclude the Doha Round and a permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes. Staff of the WTO secretariat arranged briefing sessions for parliamentarians, working with organizations such as Parlatino, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the International Assembly of the French-speaking World.

55. The Department of Public Information global network of United Nations information centres has worked regularly with parliamentary organizations and parliamentarians to highlight the work of the United Nations across a range of themes, from sustainable development to gender equality and the empowerment of women, human rights and international peace and security. In the lead-up to the seventieth session of the General Assembly, IPU and the Department worked together to produce a display for the general public on the role of parliaments in connection with the outcomes of the 2030 Agenda.

IV. Partnerships

56. The present section provides a description of how the interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and parliamentary organizations is being systematized, including through regular senior-level interactions and the convening of specialized meetings. Tools and knowledge products that have been developed for and with parliamentary partners are also reviewed.

Senior level interactions and specialized meetings

57. Parliamentary organizations have continued their engagement in various United Nations meetings, from the General Assembly to the Economic and Social Council, the Human Rights Council and beyond. For example, the Secretary-General of IPU and other IPU representatives have taken part in various segments, meetings and discussions of the Economic and Social Council throughout the biennium. For the integration segment of the Council, held in May 2016 on the theme of implementing the 2030 Agenda through policy innovation and integration, IPU mobilized parliamentary representatives to take part in panel discussions. Parliamentary organizations also supported the participation of parliamentarians in the panels and debates of the high-level political forum on sustainable development — IPU in 2014 and the Women in Parliament Global Forum in 2015. Noting the relevance of its collaboration with parliamentarians, WHO held an event with IPU during the World Health Assembly in May 2016, to discuss the role of parliamentarians in implementing the health-related Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health.

58. Conversely, senior United Nations officials have regularly taken part in the meetings of parliamentary organizations. The Secretary-General delivered remarks at the fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament and senior United Nations officials have taken part in annual joint IPU-United Nations parliamentary hearings. Several senior United Nations officials took part in the 132nd, 133rd and 134th IPU Assemblies.

59. The pattern of increasing collaboration in the context of formal meetings has also held true with parliamentary organizations other than IPU. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs took part in the tenth plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, held in March 2016 in Albania, to discuss the urgency of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the central role of parliaments in delivering it. In September 2015, the Director General of UNESCO took part in a high-level debate before the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament on the theme of cultural diversity and strengthening cooperation on the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods. UN-Women and other United Nations entities regularly collaborate with the Women in Parliament Global Forum, taking part in annual summits of the Forum, as noted above. The Administrator of UNDP, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women and several other senior United Nations officials delivered keynote addresses to the Legislators Summit of the Global Legislators Organisation, held at the French National Assembly in the margins of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

60. The primary parliamentary interlocutor for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Founded in 2000, the Network is an independent, non-governmental organization that provides a platform for more than 1,500 parliamentarians from member countries of the Bank and the Fund to advocate increased accountability and transparency in development cooperation. Through joint activities with organizations such as the Network, the Bank creates a platform for dialogue, information-sharing and development advocacy. The Bank has also

interacted with a number of other parliamentary organizations, as well as regional parliamentary bodies, such as the European Parliament and the Pan-African Parliament.

Tools and knowledge products

61. In carrying out an ambitious array of work in collaboration with parliaments and parliamentarians, the United Nations has several tools at its disposal. UNDP manages a parliamentary expert roster to ensure the swift deployment of high-quality experts at the request of a parliament. The Standby Team of Mediation Experts of the Department of Political Affairs is a roster of experts who can be deployed in support of conflict mediation and good offices efforts worldwide at very short notice. They have frequently been called upon to advise parliamentary leaders from across the political spectrum on important issues, such as power-sharing, constitution-making, natural resources and wealth-sharing, gender and inclusion.

62. The United Nations, often in collaboration with partners, has also developed several specialized web-based platforms. UN-Women, UNDP, IPU and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance have collaborated on the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, created in 2007.[2] UNDP, the World Bank, and other partners have collaborated to create AGORA, a portal for parliamentary development and its climate portal.[3] Online courses are also available from the portal, such as a course on induction for first-time parliamentarians.

63. Several knowledge products have also been developed and regularly updated. IPU provides a key global source of data on women's participation in parliament, which is used by United Nations agencies to shape policy orientation for parliamentary institutions to become more gender-inclusive. UN-Women and IPU publish a biannual map on women in politics, which aims to raise global awareness of the status of women in national parliaments and in the executive. In 2015, UNDP and IPU began work on a second global parliamentary report on the theme of "Parliament's power to hold government to account". UNDP, IPU and other partners have also developed a set of common principles for support to parliaments, launched during the 132nd IPU Assembly, in 2015, and UNDP and the Climate Parliament published a guide on renewable energy for parliamentarians in 2014. OHCHR and IPU, in partnership with the International Labour Organization, finalized a joint handbook on migration, human rights and governance in 2015. In 2014, a handbook for parliamentarians on implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP, OHCHR and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, in collaboration with IPU, and launched at the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, held on 22 and 23 September 2014. An IPU/UNAIDS parliamentary policy guide on fast-tracking HIV treatment was launched by the Secretary-General of IPU and the Executive Director of UNAIDS at the 133rd IPU Assembly, in 2015.

[2] Available from www.iknowpolitics.org.

[3] Available from www.agora-parl.org and www.agora.parl.org/climate.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

64. The present report can provide only a snapshot of the breadth and depth of interactions between the United Nations, national parliaments and parliamentary organizations at the country, regional and global levels over the last two years. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda has emerged as a clear, long-term shared priority for the continued partnership between the United Nations and the parliamentary community. The ambitious 2030 Agenda will put significant demands on public capacities and budgets for all institutions, including the United Nations, parliaments and parliamentary organizations. That will require scaled-up and more effective cooperation, as well as resources to build capacities.

65. Beyond the 2030 Agenda, other areas will require joint attention and implementation efforts going forward. They include the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement, both of which depend on well-crafted laws and legislation, along with monitoring and accountability. The capacity and will of parliamentarians is fundamental to understanding, implementing and overseeing government commitments.

66. The United Nations partnership with the parliamentary community will continue to grow and include challenges and opportunities that must be managed together. Three cases in point are described below.

67. First, the world is operating in a tight fiscal environment. Parliaments have oversight of official development assistance and other international financial commitments. The United Nations must do a better, more concerted job of working with parliamentarians to ensure that those financial assistance flows address not "just" pressing humanitarian and other emergencies, but also the underlying causes of poverty, gender inequality, environmental degradation and conflict, as directed in the 2030 Agenda. Parliaments can also help to ensure that moneys allocated for specific purposes are spent effectively, reassuring national constituencies that their dollars are well invested.

68. Second, given the natural turnover of parliamentarians following elections, the United Nations needs to continue its advocacy and regular engagement with parliamentarians to help to maintain support for key agreements and principles, including the 2030 Agenda. Parliaments are closer to civil society groups, including women's groups, youth organizations, networks and movements, voters and people from all segments of society. It is through that proximity that parliamentarians can promote greater understanding of the work of the United Nations in their respective constituencies. They can be powerful advocates for sustainable development, human rights, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding and other basic tenets of the work of the United Nations.

69. Third, there will inevitably be situations in which parliamentarians and their executive branches do not share the same views as the United Nations on specific values enshrined in the Charter or in international law. In the area of human rights and women's rights, divergent views will remain a recurring challenge in some cases. In others, political interests, for example following the party line irrespective of draft legislation going against international standards, may be prioritized, in spite of the efforts of the United Nations. Here, instead of retreat, increased engagement offers the way forward. The continuing discussion between the United Nations and IPU concerning the development of principles to assist parliaments to fulfil their

role in the protection and realization of human rights should be accelerated. Once adopted, the principles should form a solid basis to guide joint United Nations-IPU support to parliaments in the area of human rights.

70. Given the scope of the work that the United Nations carries out in partnership with national parliaments, IPU and other parliamentary organizations, a number of recommendations to strengthen that cooperation are in order.

71. **First, while always bearing in mind that the United Nations is governed by the executive branches of the world's Governments, Member States have, through a series of General Assembly resolutions, encouraged the growing involvement of parliamentarians and parliamentary organizations in the work of the United Nations. The work of IPU with the United Nations system to facilitate a parliamentary component to major United Nations processes, in particular through the annual joint parliamentary hearings, is to be welcomed. The growing practice of including legislators as members of national delegations to major United Nations meetings and events, as appropriate, could be pursued more systematically.**

72. **Second, in the light of the magnitude of the work carried out at the country level, United Nations country teams should develop a more structured and integrated manner of working with national parliaments, including by involving them in consultations on national development strategies. The United Nations should accord priority to developing such an approach, in close consultation with IPU and other parliamentary partners.**

73. **Third, the United Nations system should facilitate more South-South and triangular cooperation between parliaments and parliamentarians, including in cooperation with IPU and other parliamentary organizations and networks, especially in countries emerging from conflict and/or in transition to democracy. Building on the common principles for support to parliaments, the United Nations should work with multilateral partners, parliamentary organizations and networks and, in particular, draw on the unique expertise of IPU and its member parliaments to facilitate strengthened collaboration with civil society organizations, including women's groups, and to enhance efforts to further strengthen the capacities of parliaments to perform their legislative, oversight and representative functions. One important goal of that cooperation is to enable parliaments to be more involved in national development planning exercises and reviews of global commitments, including the 2030 Agenda.**

74. **Fourth, given the breadth and depth of interaction between the United Nations system and IPU, there should be regular exchanges between the senior leadership of the two organizations to build greater coherence in their work.**

75. **Continuous cooperation and enhanced engagement between United Nations entities and the global parliamentary community will be increasingly vital to implementing the shared global agenda. The General Assembly may wish to further explore the modalities of that cooperation and include the subject of interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and IPU as a separate item in the agenda of its seventy-second session.**

United Nations A/70/918

General Assembly

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8 June 2016
English
Original: Arabic

Seventieth session
Agenda item 73 (a)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 3 June 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, and further to our letter dated 22 May 2016 addressed to the office of the Secretary-General (No. 265), I should like to convey to you the following information:

In response to the invitation it received to participate in the inaugural World Humanitarian Summit, which was held in Istanbul, Turkey on 23 and 24 May 2016, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic officially informed the United Nations and the organizers of its intention to participate in the Summit. It commissioned its Consul General and a number of its accredited diplomats at its Consulate General in Istanbul to participate in and represent Syria at the meeting, and submitted its credentials to the organizers in accordance with the established procedures for such conferences.

On 22 May 2016, just one day before the start of the Summit, we were surprised by the Turkish regime's refusal to allow the representatives of the Syrian Government to attend or participate in the Summit. The false and spurious pretexts invoked by the representatives of the Turkish regime were completely at variance with the fact that the conference was organized and convened under the auspices of the United Nations, and that the host country therefore had no right to take any action that would prevent a State Member of the United Nations from participating in the Summit.

On 22 May 2016, in a letter addressed to your office, the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic requested that you take appropriate and urgent action to address the issue and call on the Turkish regime to reverse its position, which was in breach of the established rules and procedures of the United Nations, and allow the members of the Syrian delegation to participate in and represent their country at the Summit, in order to express their Government's position and the relevant measures it has adopted.

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Please recycle

Unfortunately, to date, we have not received any response to that letter and have not seen any type of steps being taken to address the issue that we brought to your attention.

In light of the above, we wish to inform you that we strongly oppose and reject the manner in which the Secretariat has handled this issue, which will set an unwelcome precedent by silencing the voices of States Members of this Organization and excluding them from international conferences.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its position that it will not recognize or be bound by the commitments and outcomes of the Summit, given that the Syrian Arab Republic, a founding and full Member of the United Nations, was deprived from participating in the Summit.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be issued as a document of the seventieth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 73 (a).

United Nations A/70/919

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 June 2016

Original: English

Seventieth session
Agenda item 72 (c)
Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/234, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report, within 45 days, on the implementation of the resolution by the Syrian authorities. In the resolution, the Assembly demanded that all parties should immediately put an end to violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law. The report covers the period from 1 November 2015 to 1 February 2016, and provides an update on respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Syrian Arab Republic.

16-09456 (E) 150616

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/234, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report, within 45 days, on the implementation of the resolution by the Syrian authorities. In the resolution, the Assembly demanded that all parties should immediately put an end to all violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law.

2. The report provides an update on respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Syrian Arab Republic. It should be read in conjunction with the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.[1]

3. The report is based on information available to United Nations entities on the ground and in the region, from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and from open sources. It covers the period from 1 November 2015 to 1 February 2016.

II. International legal obligations

4. The Syrian Arab Republic is party to several international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Syrian authorities are therefore bound to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights contained in those treaties.

5. All parties to the armed conflict are bound by the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

III. Major developments

6. Human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law continued unabated in the Syrian Arab Republic. Civilians continued to be killed and injured in large numbers by air strikes, mortar and artillery fire and by improvised explosive devices, such as barrel and car bombs.

7. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented a wide range of human rights violations by government forces and armed groups affiliated with the Government, including violations of the right to life, the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to liberty of movement, the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom of expression. OHCHR also documented serious violations of international

[1] For a comprehensive list of reports, see: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx.

humanitarian law by Syrian officials, which included grave breaches of common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, including cruel treatment and torture, humiliating and degrading treatment, and failing to care for the sick and wounded. In addition, OHCHR documented allegations of serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in non-international armed conflicts by the Syrian authorities, including the displacement of civilians, the use of starvation as a weapon of war against civilians, the failure to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack and the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks.

8. OHCHR also documented violations of international humanitarian law by non-State armed opposition groups and United Nations-designated terrorist groups. In terms of common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, they included failing to protect persons taking no active part in hostilities and subjecting them to violence to life and person, including murder, cruel treatment and torture; committing outrages upon personal dignity, particularly humiliating and degrading treatment; the taking of hostages; and the passing of sentences or carrying out of executions without judicial safeguards. OHCHR further documented allegations that armed groups affiliated with the Government, non-State armed opposition groups and United Nations-designated terrorist groups were violating the laws and customs applicable in non-international armed conflicts, such as failing to adhere to the international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks, rape, sexual slavery, the recruitment of children and their use in hostilities under 18 years of age and the displacement and deportation of civilians.

9. OHCHR has also received numerous reports claiming that foreign States, in numerous instances, failed to comply with their obligations under international law, including the core international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack.

A. Civilians in the context of hostilities

10. OHCHR continued to document a large number of military attacks, launched from the air and ground by both government forces and their allies, armed groups and United Nations-designated terrorist groups, which killed and wounded civilians.

11. The area of eastern Ghutah in Rif Dimashq was heavily attacked by government forces, with the town of Duma especially hard hit. Between 2 and 22 November, OHCHR documented at least four separate attacks in which a minimum of 43 civilians, including 12 children, were killed and many more injured by air strikes, mortars and shelling of residential areas. Severe damage to the local infrastructure was also reported. The Ghannam marketplace repeatedly witnessed civilian casualties: on 4 December 2015, six civilians, including two children, were reportedly killed when bombs were dropped on the marketplace. The market was hit again on 6 December, by mortars, and seven civilians, including two children, were allegedly killed. On 13 December, at least 41 civilians, including 9 children, were reportedly killed and at least 89 injured in a series of air strikes that lasted several hours. Four schools were reportedly damaged in the attack, with the Duma II and Hasan al-Basri schools alleged to have sustained significant damage. In the latter, eight children and four teachers were reportedly killed.

12. In Homs governorate, six civilians were reportedly killed in the village of Hulah on 3 December, as a result of heavy shelling allegedly launched by the Government from a checkpoint situated near the water company offices. At least 10 civilians, including 3 children, were reportedly killed on 4 December when a rocket struck a residential area in Talbiseh. The town was hit again several times from the air between 15 and 21 December, resulting in the reported death and injury of an undetermined number of civilians. The Government reportedly launched air strikes on Rastan on 20 December, killing three civilians, and on 22 December, reportedly killing at least two civilians. On the same day, two civilians, including a 2-year-old child, were allegedly killed in Taiba when a rocket struck their house. The attack also reportedly resulted in the displacement of a number of civilians to neighbouring villages. On 23 December, two civilians were allegedly killed in government air strikes on the village of Taldu.

13. In Aleppo governorate, witnesses reported several incidents in which alleged government air strikes caused civilian casualties in opposition-controlled areas of Aleppo. Between 14 and 21 December, at least nine civilians were killed, including four children, and dozens were injured in the neighbourhoods of Marjah, Firdaws, Ma'adi and Asharafiyah, Hallak and Shaykh Faris. Outside the city itself, 11 civilians, including a child, were reportedly killed on 17 December in I'zaz by an alleged government air strike. On 19 December, six civilians were reportedly killed in the village of Huraytan, in an alleged government air strike.

14. Meanwhile, non-State armed opposition groups continued to launch attacks on civilian areas through the use of mortars, improvised projectiles, artillery shells and improvised explosive devices, including suicide and car bombs.

15. In November and December, mortars and rockets were fired into the centre of Damascus and government-controlled areas of Aleppo and Ladhiqiyah, reportedly causing numerous civilian casualties. The United Nations documented at least 191 mortar strikes on Damascus in November, which killed at least 13 civilians. Furthermore, the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva sent two notes verbales to OHCHR, dated 18 November and 3 December 2015, claiming that, in October and November, 252 rockets had been fired by opposition forces at civilian areas in the governorates of Damascus and Rif Dimashq, 55 in Aleppo, 17 in Homs, 1 in Hama, 3 in Ladhiqiyah and 45 in Dar'a. According to the Syrian authorities, 43 civilians had allegedly been killed and 218 wounded as a result of those attacks, with damage to private and public property also reported. Such attacks were reported by the Government to have continued throughout December, with mortars and rockets hitting civilian neighbourhoods, markets and buildings, including places of worship, schools and medical facilities. The attacks allegedly killed and injured many civilians, including women and children, and damaged infrastructure and residential buildings. They affected busy and densely populated civilian areas, such as Bab Tuma, Baramkah, Abu Rummanah, Sha'alan, Hamra' Street, Umawiyin, Salihiya, Duwaylah and Thawrah Street. According to unconfirmed information provided by the Syrian authorities to OHCHR, 222 civilians, including at least 18 children, were killed and 585, including at least 28 children, injured in attacks launched by armed opposition groups on civilian areas in December. The attacks allegedly occurred in the governorates of Aleppo, Hasakah, Damascus, Idlib, Rif Dimashq, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Homs and Qunaytirah. The weapons used were listed as mortars, artillery fire, car bombs, landmines, sniper fire and improvised explosive devices, including home-made rockets, mortars and pipe bombs.

16. With regard to attacks by the designated terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), December witnessed a sharp increase in the number of car and suicide bombings in civilian areas of government- and Kurdish-held towns and cities, reportedly causing a large number of civilian casualties. On 12 December, a bomb hidden in a Syrian Arab Red Crescent vehicle was placed near the Ahli Hospital, in the Zahra' neighbourhood of Homs. The explosion allegedly killed at least 16 civilians and injured 45. On 10 December, three tankers filled with explosives were detonated in the middle of Tal! Thamir, reportedly killing 22 civilians. In that instance, ISIL stated that it had been targeting Kurdish forces. On 30 December, at approximately 10 p.m., bombs went off in the Miami and Gibrail restaurants in the predominantly Christian neighbourhood of Wastah, in the town of Qamishli. At least 16 civilians were reportedly killed and at least 30 injured. ISIL separately claimed responsibility for all those attacks. On 28 December, a car bomb exploded, followed shortly by a suicide bombing in the Zahra' neighbourhood, killing more than 30 civilians and injuring at least 90. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

17. Reports were also received by OHCHR indicating the use of human shields by non-State armed opposition groups and ISIL, in clear violation of international humanitarian law. In Rif Dimashq governorate, on 1 November, the armed group Army of Islam circulated a video showing men and women in civilian clothing placed in cages and being driven around Duma. In the video, a person claiming to be a Syrian army officer and a group of women were filmed in cages, calling upon the Syrian army and Russian forces to stop the bombing and killing of innocent civilians in eastern Ghutah. According to additional information available to OHCHR, civilians, along with other protected persons, including captured soldiers and their families, were placed in around 100 cages on the back of pickups and driven around Duma. A spokesperson for the Army of Islam later denied using the captives as human shields, claiming that it had been meant more as a bargaining chip to save the lives of children and civilians in Duma.

18. There is great concern for civilians living in areas under the control of ISIL. OHCHR received information that, owing to the intensification of air strikes on Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr governorates following the terrorist attacks in Paris of 13 November 2015, ISIL began preventing all civilians under 60 years of age from leaving areas under its control, except for urgent medical cases. Drivers caught attempting to smuggle civilians out of ISIL areas were subject to a fine of $5,000. Reports also suggest that ISIL has been using civilian residential buildings as shelter for its fighters in Raqqah and that members of ISIL have been sheltering in bunkers located under residential buildings.

19. OHCHR received allegations that at least 214 civilians had been killed by air strikes carried out by international actors in November and at least 217 civilians in December. Those attacks also damaged or destroyed schools and medical facilities. However, the allegations could not be adequately verified, owing to the difficulty of gaining access to the areas and of identifying high-flying aircraft. Numerous reports were received claiming to provide information regarding responsibility for many of the air strikes in which civilians were either killed or injured. The quantity of such reports from various sources in 2016 referring to a large number of incidents is a matter of serious concern.

B. Executions

20. Reports continued to be received of ISIL conducting executions in areas under its control. The executions were often preceded by outrages upon personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment, and the executions themselves were conducted in a manner inflicting unnecessary suffering. For example, on 2 November, in the town of Albu Kamal, ISIL reportedly crucified and killed a man accused of robbery near the great mosque. On the same day, in the village of Mayishiya, ISIL reportedly beheaded an 80-year-old man for blasphemy. On 4 December, in the village of Qahtaniyah, after Friday noon prayers, ISIL fighters reportedly beheaded a person accused of being a spy. On 8 December, they reportedly executed three people for allegedly mocking ISIL and hung their bodies up at the Kanisah roundabout, in the town of Tabaqah. On 3 December, ISIL released a video showing the execution of six residents of Dayr al-Zawr who had been accused of dealing with the Government. The video appears to show children under 15 years of age carrying out the executions. On the same day, in the vicinity of the Masriya roundabout, in Albu Kamal, ISIL reportedly executed a woman for blasphemy. On 4 December, ISIL informed the families of two children of 15 and 17 years of age, from the town of Kharitah, that they had been executed. On 22 December, ISIL reportedly executed three people in Tadmur (Palmyra), accusing them of collaboration with the Government.

C. Detention and deprivation of liberty

21. OHCHR has continued to document cases of arbitrary detention, deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and a lack of access to adequate medical care in detention facilities.

22. On 17 November, inmates in the government-run Homs central prison reportedly protested against ill-treatment, including harassment of female detainees and visitors by one particular prison guard, along with the alleged torture of a male prisoner who had been informed that he was being released. Prison guards reportedly used live ammunition and tear gas in an attempt to put down the protest, injuring some of the detainees. A video message from prisoners posted on the Internet claimed that electricity, water and food supplies to the prison had been cut off for a period.

23. OHCHR has received information about an outbreak of tuberculosis in Hama central prison. As at mid-October, there were at least 30 inmates with suspected symptoms. Only a few of the sick detainees were allegedly able to obtain medicine after bribing prison guards. In an encouraging move, however, information received indicated that in late November/early December, the authorities had allowed the Syrian Arab Red Crescent into the prison to provide medical treatment to inmates. As with all central prisons in the Syrian Arab Republic, those of Hama and Homs fall under the authority of the Prisons Division of the Ministry of the Interior.

24. There was also growing concern regarding the deterioration of conditions in the women's section of Adra central prison, in Damascus, following unconfirmed reports that nearly 300 additional detainees had been brought to the section in November and December, leading to severe overcrowding of the already cramped

section. Those detainees were reportedly transferred from various security branches, including Khatib branch, the Palestine branch and the Directorate of Political Security. The large majority were reportedly being held for participation in anti-government protests over the past years. OHCHR was also informed that the deteriorating situation had been exacerbated by the lack of medical care and adequate clothing. Of particular concern was the information that 17 children were reportedly being detained with their mothers. Intermittent clashes between government forces and non-State armed opposition groups in the vicinity of the women's section allegedly prevented any further transfer of ill detainees from the prison to Harasta hospital for medical care.

25. OHCHR received various reports regarding deprivation of liberty and forced recruitment of civilians by the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) non-State armed opposition group. On 18 December, YPG reportedly arrested eight Kurdish civilians for participating in protests in the town of Mu'abbadah, rural Malikiyah, against abuses perpetrated by YPG against civilians. On 21 December, YPG raided the village of Umariyin, 20 km south of Qamishli, and reportedly assaulted an older man for speaking out against the group's cruel treatment of civilians. Three other civilians were arrested for the same reason. On 14 December, YPG fighters reportedly entered the village of Suwaydiyah, southern rural Hasakah, and forcibly conscripted 34 Kurdish civilians, including women and children. Families who opposed the recruitments were reportedly deprived of their liberty. On 20 December, YPG allegedly forcibly conscripted civilians at the Sinalko and Sabbagh roundabouts in Hasakah city. On 21 December, YPG reportedly entered the village of Rahya al-Bani Sab', Hasakah, and forcibly conscripted Kurdish civilians.

26. In areas under its control, ISIL continued to deprive civilians of their liberty and to ill-treat and torture them. OHCHR received reports that ISIL was inflicting cruel and degrading treatment on civilians deemed to have violated radical religious rules imposed by the group on the local population. In November, several incidents were reported of women being deprived of their liberty by the Khansa' (female police) and Hisbah branches of ISIL, in Dayr al-Zawr. The stated reasons included, but were not limited to, failing to wear the correct clothes as dictated by ISIL, adultery and leaving their home alone without the necessary ISIL-directed male guardian. Reports were also received of men being deprived of their liberty for offences ranging from not paying *zakat* and delaying prayer time to being clean-shaven. On 1 December, the Hisbah branch deprived a woman of her liberty in Sukkariyah village, eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr, for allegedly failing to wear the correct clothes. On 3 December, the Khansa' branch deprived two women of their liberty in Albu Kamal, allegedly for speaking loudly while walking in a local market. The following day, in Jala' town, ISIL fighters deprived three civilians, including a child, of their liberty for being late for prayers. On 9 December, in Tabaqah, ISIL deprived a Christian civilian of his liberty for not paying taxes, which all Christians are obliged to pay under ISIL.

27. As at 1 February 2016, 29 United Nations staff members were missing or remained deprived of their liberty in the Syrian Arab Republic: 27 from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 from the United Nations Development Programme and 1 from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

D. Use of chemical weapons

28. On 6 November, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) announced that it had circulated to States parties three reports of its fact-finding mission. The mission was tasked with looking into three separate sets of incidents in which the use of toxic chemicals in the Syrian Arab Republic had been reported, in violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law, particularly with regard to violations of the right to life and the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

29. On the basis of information provided by the Government that its soldiers had sustained casualties from the use of toxic chemicals, the OPCW mission conducted three deployments to the Syrian Arab Republic. It issued an interim report, in which it detailed its analysis of an incident reported to have occurred in Jobar on 29 August 2015. On the basis of the available evidence regarding the incident, the mission could not confidently determine that a chemical had been used as a weapon.

30. A second team investigated allegations of the use of toxic chemicals between March and May 2015, in the Idlib governorate, which reportedly resulted in the deaths of six people. On the basis of an analysis of the information and evidence available to it, the mission concluded that the incidents had probably involved the use of one or more toxic chemicals, probably containing chlorine, as a weapon.

31. The mission also investigated an incident that occurred on 21 August 2015, in which a non-State actor allegedly used a chemical weapon in the town of Mari', close to Aleppo. The mission collected samples and interviewed two individuals affected by exposure and the medical staff treating them. In that case, the mission was able to confirm with the utmost confidence that at least two people had been exposed to sulfur mustard and were recovering from that exposure. The team concluded that it was very likely that the effects of sulfur mustard had resulted in the death of a baby.

32. On 23 November, the Executive Council of OPCW adopted by consensus a decision expressing grave concern regarding the findings of the fact-finding mission that chemical weapons had once again been used in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Council reaffirmed its condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances and emphasized that any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone under any circumstances was unacceptable and in violation of international law. The Council expressed its strong conviction that the individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable.

E. Denial of humanitarian access

33. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, humanitarian access throughout the north-western (northern Ladhiqiyah, Idlib and Aleppo) and north-eastern (Raqqah, Hasakah and Dayr al-Zawr) governorates remained difficult and was nearly non-existent in ISIL-controlled areas. Overall, in areas not being contested, humanitarian partners were able to continue to provide assistance. In areas being contested, humanitarian programmes were suspended owing to fighting. Six non-governmental organizations suspended their activities in northern Ladhiqiyah owing to an increase in air strikes by government forces.

34. Furthermore, siege has been systematically laid to cities, towns and villages, denying humanitarian access and, in at least some instances, apparently using starvation of civilians as a weapon of war. Indications point to both government forces and armed groups affiliated with the Government on the one side and non-State armed opposition groups on the other using trapped civilians as bargaining chips. All individuals, including those living in besieged areas, have the right to food and health. Those rights must at the very least be protected and respected, in particular by not creating any obstacles to their realization. Under common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, parties to a conflict are to care for the sick and wounded. Intentional starvation is a serious violation of international human rights and humanitarian law and could be prosecuted as a war crime.

35. OHCHR has documented a number of sieges by government forces. The most recent and notorious case concerns the town of Madaya, near Zabadani. After the government offensive on Zabadani began on 2 July 2015, many of the residents were displaced to Madaya and other nearby villages. Government forces subsequently allegedly compelled those displaced to the nearby villages of Bludan and Ma'murah to move to Madaya. Consequently, the population of the town increased to some 40,000. At the same time, the town was placed under siege, with the support of the government-affiliated armed group Hizbullah, with imports severely restricted and civilians prevented from leaving by government forces and affiliated armed groups. Civilians seeking to leave were shot or killed by landmines placed in the surrounding countryside. Reports received by OHCHR from individuals in the town indicated that children and other civilians had died as a result of starvation and lack of access to adequate medical care. A humanitarian convoy made up of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent managed to deliver aid to the town on 11 January 2016, after being granted permission by the Government. Another convoy reached the town on 14 January. The humanitarians delivering the aid found the health of civilians to be in an extremely grave condition. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator later stated that 300 to 400 people in the local hospital were in need of immediate medical evacuation.

36. On 11 and 14 January, humanitarian aid also reached the villages of Fu'ah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate, where some 20,000 civilians were under siege by armed opposition groups, namely Ahrar al-Sham and the Nusrah Front. Although of serious concern, the humanitarian situation did not reach the gravity of that of Madaya, given that the Government was able to airlift supplies into the villages. However, fears persisted for the safety of the population, following threats by Ahrar al-Sham and the Nusrah Front that they would kill the villagers in retaliation for actions by pro-government forces against areas under the control of non-State armed opposition groups.

37. Some 200,000 people continue to live under an ISIL-imposed siege in the government-controlled Jurah, Qusur, Bughayliyah and Harabish neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr. Civilians have also reportedly been prevented from leaving by government forces trapped inside the neighbourhoods. Reports indicate a complete lack of electricity and a severe water shortage. Medical assistance is also in short supply, with only field hospitals operating and restricted to emergency cases. Given that the surrounding area is controlled by ISIL, it has been impossible for the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance. The Government has been flying in humanitarian assistance through the military airport in Dayr al-Zawr and Russian forces flew in aid in January.

F. Displacement

38. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, displacement throughout the country remained high, with an estimated 6.5 million people not residing in their place of origin as at February 2016.[2] Continuing fighting on the ground and air strikes have been the main cause of the continued displacement. Furthermore, according to figures provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as at 31 December 2015, 4,602,203 Syrians were registered as refugees, including 2,503,549 in Turkey, 1,070,189 in Lebanon and 633,466 in Jordan.[3]

39. Reports received by OHCHR in December 2015 pointed towards the alleged forced displacement of civilians by YPG forces in areas under their control, in violation of international humanitarian law. On 3 December, YPG forces closed all roads leading to the city of Hasakah, reportedly preventing displaced Arab civilians coming from southern rural Hasakah from entering the city and arresting many for allegedly being linked to ISIL. On the same day, YPG fighters allegedly set houses ablaze in the Arab villages of Mabrukah, Abu al-Shakhat, Raj'an, and Raj'iya, in the district of Ra's al-Ayn, Hasakah governorate, accusing the inhabitants of having links to ISIL. On 4 December, YPG allegedly ordered Arabs from the villages of Dwayrah, Shirkah and Nasirah, southern Ra's al-Ayn, to leave their villages. Allegations were also received that YPG forces were preventing Arab civilians from the ISIL-held villages of Shaddadah and Jabal Abdulaziz from entering areas under their control, with some civilians being held in a YPG camp located in Mabrukah, Ra's al-Ayn. Sources indicated that at least 2,000 civilians from Hasakah and Raqqah were being held there. The indication is that those civilians were screened to identify possible ISIL elements among them. Reports were also received that, on 21 December, in Tall Abyad, YPG allegedly forcefully evicted from their houses 43 Arab civilians from six families, including persons with disabilities and 19 children, with no reason given for the order.

G. Right to health

40. Health facilities continued to be affected by the fighting, which hampered the right to adequate health care of the civilian population. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that, in November, 25 incidents were reported that resulted in health facilities being damaged or destroyed in hostilities. As at 11 December, WHO had verified 3 of those incidents and was verifying the remaining 22. Two of the verified incidents concerned hospitals in Dar'a and Idlib governorates and the third concerned a primary health facility in Aleppo governorate. Two were missile strikes and one was a barrel bomb. Of the 22 incidents not yet verified, 14 reportedly concerned hospitals. Fifteen of the 25 alleged incidents reportedly involved air-to-surface missiles, 7 involved surface-to-surface missiles and 3 involved barrel bombs. According to WHO, 6 people died in those incidents, including 2 medical staff, and 45 were wounded, including 7 medical staff.

[2] See www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/about-crisis.

[3] See http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php for the most recent figures.

H. Right to education

41. UNICEF raised concern that the failure to resolve an increasingly protracted conflict was threatening an entire generation of children. At the time of writing, 1 in 4 schools in the Syrian Arab Republic was not operational, given that they had been damaged, destroyed, or were being used as shelters for the internally displaced or for military purposes. Owing to the unsafe learning environment, coupled with other factors, such as insecurity, including unsafe routes to and from school, displacement and shortages of teachers and supplies, more than 2 million children were out of school inside the country and 446,000 were at a risk of dropping out.

42. UNICEF has estimated that at least 20 per cent of children have to cross active front lines of conflict to take their examinations. Some children reported taking a perilous journey, passing through countless checkpoints manned by armed fighters.

43. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the protracted crisis has continued to reverse the educational advances achieved before 2011. According to the analysis in the Humanitarian Response Plan for the Syrian Arab Republic for 2016, produced by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, nearly 6 million children and young people (in and out of school) and educational personnel, including more than 40,000 Palestine refugees, remained in need of educational assistance.[4] While the United Nations and its development partners have provided as much assistance as possible to support enrolment, rehabilitate educational facilities and improve learning experiences, with particular attention paid to psychosocial support, the acute limitation of resources and of geographical outreach has made it difficult to uphold the right to education for all. While evidence remains scarce, according to a UNESCO analysis that situation appears to apply particularly to young people of an age to be in secondary and higher education.

I. Violations of the human rights of women

44. According to the humanitarian needs overview for 2016, produced by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, almost 1 in 5 of the 272 subdistricts in the country reported severe problems with sexual and gender-based violence.[5] There was significant underreporting of violations of the human rights of women, especially with regard to sexual and gender-based violence, owing to cultural norms, stigma and threats against survivors.

45. Women and girls continued to be particularly affected by radical religious laws implemented by armed groups including, but not limited to, ISIL in areas under their control. That included the public humiliation of women not abiding by radical dress codes and restrictions on their freedom of movement, association and expression. Women deemed to have violated such rules were frequently subject to inhuman and degrading treatment.

[4] See www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_hrp_syrian_arab_republic.pdf.

[5] See www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2016_hno_syrian_arab_republic.pdf.

46. Reports received by OHCHR indicated that ISIL continued to hold hundreds of women and girls from the Iraqi Yazidi community captive in sexual slavery in the Syrian Arab Republic and to subject them to extreme sexual and physical abuse. Most of those women were reportedly held in Raqqah governorate and many were below 18 years of age. Women and girls from the Yazidi community were reportedly sold, traded, gifted to fighters or otherwise trafficked. ISIL also reportedly forced other women and girls living in areas under its control into marriage with its fighters.

J. Violation of child rights

47. The conflict continued to result in high levels of violations affecting children. In November and December, OHCHR documented the reported killing of at least 80 children as a result of air strikes, shelling and mortars, allegedly carried out by government forces, armed groups affiliated with the Government, non-State armed opposition groups, United Nations-designated terrorist groups and international actors.

48. On 3 December, ISIL released a video of the execution of six people in the Rahbah citadel in Mayadin, Dayr al-Zawr. The victims were accused of collaborating with the Government. The video showed what appeared to be children carrying out the executions, encouraged to seek out the prisoners hidden in various parts of the citadel and kill them. On 4 December, the families of two children in the town of Kharitah in western Dayr al-Zawr were informed by ISIL that they had been killed.

49. From early 2015 until the end of October, the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict documented 203 cases of children being killed and 329 cases of children being injured, mostly as a result of indiscriminate attacks, including the use of explosive weapons in densely populated civilian areas. Children were also killed by snipers, in public executions, including beheadings, by ISIL (with children made to attend and participate), as a result of torture in detention and from landmines and explosive remnants of war.

50. According to UNICEF, cases of recruitment and use in hostilities of children continued to be documented. From early 2015, UNICEF verified 46 cases of recruitment (43 boys, 1 girl, 2 unknown): 21 were attributed to ISIL, 16 to non-State armed opposition groups, 5 to armed groups affiliated with the Government, 2 (including a girl) to YPG and 2 to government forces. UNICEF reported that children were increasingly recruited at younger ages (some as young as 7 years of age) by non-State armed groups. According to UNICEF, children's participation in combat was widespread and some armed opposition groups forced children to carry out grave human rights abuses, including executions and torture, while government forces allegedly submitted children to forced labour or used them as human shields.

51. OHCHR documented the forcible recruitment by YPG, on 14 December, of a boy no older than 10 years, at the Ma'shuq School, in rural Qamishli. OHCHR also received reports that the Army of Islam, based in Duma, eastern Ghutah, was continuing to recruit boys as young as 16 years of age into its ranks, primarily to distribute food and perform administrative tasks. On 11 December, ISIL publicly announced the already-known existence of a children's section among its ranks, the

"Cubs of the Caliphate". OHCHR also received allegations that ISIL was encouraging children between 10 and 14 years of age to join. Furthermore, images released by ISIL showed children being trained in military combat.

52. The monitoring and reporting mechanism documented 27 cases of arrest and detention of children by government forces and 17 cases of deprivation of liberty of children by non-State armed opposition groups. Rape and other forms of sexual violence remained severely underreported, with no cases verified in 2015. That is partly due to fear of reprisals, stigmatization and the lack of safe and confidential response services.

53. There also continued to be allegations of the early/forced marriage of girls to ISIL fighters.

54. According to a report released by UNICEF and Save the Children in July 2015, children in the Syrian Arab Republic were contributing to the family income in more than three quarters of households surveyed.[6]

K. Damage to and destruction of cultural heritage

55. The armed conflict continued to threaten and affect cultural heritage, including UNESCO World Heritage sites. According to UNESCO, cultural heritage continued to be damaged by shelling, street fighting, targeted explosions and extensive illegal excavations, in addition to being used for military bases and training areas and suffering from construction violations, quarrying and inappropriate use of archaeological sites by internally displaced populations.

56. The intentional directing of attacks against historic monuments is a violation of international humanitarian law. In November 2015, tunnel bombings reportedly caused severe damage to parts of the citadel in the ancient city of Aleppo, which was extensively destroyed and risks further irreversible destruction. UNESCO also reported that illegal excavations across archaeological sites were a major source for the illicit trafficking of cultural objects and continued to result in extensive and irreversible damage to those sites. They are also a source of funding for some of the groups engaged in the conflict. According to UNESCO, the Syrian authorities have reportedly seized more than 6,000 artefacts in the past four years. The Turkish police provided UNESCO with an extensive list of recorded illicit trafficking of artefacts that it was addressing, along with thousands of artefacts seized throughout Turkey.

L. Refugees in neighbouring countries

57. Since November 2015, about 431,000 Syrian refugees have been registered in neighbouring countries, bringing the total number of registered refugees in the region to more than 4.7 million. Although Syrian refugees have fled to numerous countries, the vast majority are currently in Turkey, followed by Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

[6] See UNICEF and Save the Children "Small hands, heavy burden: how the Syria conflict is driving more children into the workforce", available from http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CHILD-LABOUR.pdf.

58. An increase in movements from the Syrian Arab Republic into neighbouring countries through unofficial crossing points continued to be reported. That trend is probably the result of increasing border enforcement at official crossing points and admission restrictions. In some countries, where unofficial border crossings have been used for several years as the sole entry points, entry has become heavily restricted and Syrian refugees have consequently been stranded in border areas for up to several months.

59. The conflict continues to pose serious security implications for the region. With worsening conditions inside the country, the safety and well-being of fleeing civilians stranded in border areas is of great concern. If those civilians are not adequately assisted and subsequently admitted to the host country, their lives will be at risk. Access to the territory, safety and prevention of refoulement remain critical.

60. The hosting of more than 4.7 million Syrian refugees has put a heavy strain on the infrastructure and economy of neighbouring countries.

IV. Access to civil status documentation

61. According to the humanitarian needs overview for 2016, a lack or loss of civil documentation was identified as one of the key protection concerns.[5] Key documents are often lost or destroyed as civilians flee the conflict or because their homes are damaged or destroyed. The ability to renew or verify such documents is further severely hampered by the lack of official civil registration services in areas outside government control or because government record offices have been affected by the fighting.

62. The lack of documentation compromises the ability of civilians to gain access to services and employment and limits their capacity to cope with the effects of the conflict. It also compromises their freedom of movement, notably their ability to move to safer locations within the country or to flee the country. Moreover, in the absence of documentation proving their age and therefore their status as children, adolescents are more susceptible to child labour and recruitment by armed actors. Unregistered children are also at risk of statelessness, particularly those born as a result of rape. Civilians also face difficulties in claiming child custody, property rights and inheritance. The tracing of families separated as a result of the conflict is also severely affected.

V. Impunity

63. Under international humanitarian law, parties to a conflict are obliged to investigate violations allegedly committed by their forces and to prosecute suspects. By the same token, those responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses, in particular those amounting to international crimes, must be promptly, thoroughly, impartially and independently investigated and those responsible must be prosecuted to ensure that victims have recourse to effective remedies.

64. To date, OHCHR has received little credible information that parties to the conflict have taken action as required by international law, such as investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law or reported violations and abuses of international human rights law by individuals operating under their authority.

VI. Observations

65. Notwithstanding numerous resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, including resolution 70/234, gross human rights violations and abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law continue to be perpetrated on a large scale throughout the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations is engaged in documenting those violations, particularly through the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council in 2011. Through my monthly reports to the Security Council on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), I have repeatedly expressed serious concerns about such violations and abuses and stressed that those responsible must be held to account. In that context, I reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

66. I am deeply troubled by the continued reports of grave human rights violations perpetrated by the Government against its own people, including deprivation of life, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary detention and the curtailing of the freedom of movement and expression.

67. The continued military attacks by the Government and its allies, which have killed and injured civilians, are alarming and may indicate a failure to respect the three cardinal principles of international humanitarian law: distinguishing civilians and civilian objects from fighters and military objectives, taking precautions in attack to spare civilians and civilian objects and respecting the principle of proportionality in the conduct of hostilities. Weapons are also being used indiscriminately, in violation of the principle of distinction, as their effect cannot be adequately controlled and limited to legitimate military targets. That includes explosive weapons with a large impact radius, such as barrel bombs, artillery shells and mortars, used in areas with a known high-density civilian population and at times when it is expected that a large number of civilians will be in the vicinity. Such indiscriminate attacks continue to lead to many civilian deaths and injuries, including women and children, and must cease immediately.

68. The imposition of sieges by government forces and armed groups affiliated with the Government has resulted in civilians, including children, starving to death. International humanitarian law prohibits the denial of humanitarian assistance and the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. It is also a violation of human rights law if a State fails to ensure the right to freedom from hunger as the minimum essential level of the right to adequate food.

69. I condemn in the strongest terms reports indicating that non-State armed opposition groups and United Nations-designated terrorist groups are subjecting a large number of people to abduction, displacement, deportation, deprivation of liberty, murder, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture. Of particular concern are the recruitment and use of children in hostilities and the forcing of children to witness and carry out executions. I am shocked at the appalling degrading and inhuman treatment inflicted on people before execution, which is clearly intended to inflict maximum suffering and terror on the victims and the population at large.

70. I am alarmed by reports of attacks by non-State armed opposition groups and United Nations-designated terrorist groups that have killed and injured civilians and, as such, appear to fail to respect the three cardinal principles of international

humanitarian law: distinguishing civilians and civilian objects from fighters and military objectives, respecting the principle of proportionality in the conduct of hostilities and applying a precautionary approach in carrying out attacks. Weapons are similarly also being used indiscriminately or with indiscriminate effects, in violation of the principle of distinction, as their effect cannot be adequately controlled and limited to legitimate military targets. Explosive weapons with a large impact radius, such as artillery shells and mortars, and improvised explosive devices, such as car bombs and suicide bombings, are being used in areas with a known high-density civilian population and at times when it is expected that a large number of civilians will be in the vicinity. Such indiscriminate attacks continue to lead to a large number of civilian deaths and injuries, including women and children, and must cease immediately.

71. I am appalled at the information received on the imposition of sieges by non-State armed opposition groups and United Nations-designated terrorist groups, which are inflicting untold suffering upon civilians. Parties to the conflict must respect and abide by all principles of international humanitarian law.

72. Civilians continue to pay the highest price for the conflict. Women continue to be abducted, raped and sexually enslaved, while children are being killed, displaced, orphaned, recruited for or used in hostilities and forced to witness and participate in the commission of gross and serious abuses and violations. I am deeply concerned that more than 2 million children are also being denied their right to education, which poses immense challenges to the present and future of the Syrian Arab Republic. Such violations and abuses must cease immediately.

73. I urge in the strongest terms that all parties to the conflict strictly respect international law. The rights to life; not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; to liberty and security of person; to education; to access to adequate medical care and to freedom of movement, expression and association must be protected and promoted.

74. Those who deliberately target civilians may be accused of war crimes and, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, may also be accused of crimes against humanity. They must be held to account. Attacks in heavily populated areas and the damage and destruction of medical centres must cease immediately, as must the deliberate starvation of civilians as a tactic of war. I call for immediate respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, which must include the lifting of all sieges, respect for the right to freedom of movement of civilians and the right to health without distinction. I also call for access to all detention facilities for humanitarian purposes by national and international humanitarian aid providers, such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the United Nations. I also call upon all parties to fully cooperate with OHCHR and the Commission of Inquiry, including by granting their staff access to the country.

75. I also take this opportunity to remind all parties to the conflict of their obligation to investigate all allegations of human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.

76. The conflict has reduced what was a middle-income country with a high literacy rate and a respected education system to one in which nearly half the population has either fled the country or has been displaced within it. The conflict is

also a destabilizing factor for the overall security situation in the region and beyond, acting as a recruitment call for extremist groups.

77. I therefore urge the international community to work together to ensure a secure nationwide ceasefire and a comprehensive and credible peace process, while addressing the dire humanitarian and protection needs of civilians in the country and of Syrian refugees. There must be an inclusive political solution, which allows voices from the entire political, ethnic and religious spectrum to be heard and taken into account. About 250,000 people have died in the Syrian Arab Republic and we must all work towards ensuring that the suffering of the Syrian people comes promptly to an end.